

The Becoming of Space: A Geography of Liminal Practices of the City of Antofagasta, Chile

Alberto Corsin Jimenez
St Antony's College

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Anthropology and Geography
in compliance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy (D.Phil.) of the University of Oxford

Hilary Term, 2001

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I endorse and put forward the idea that space is a practical category; that is, not a place or setting where we stand and do things, not even - or not solely - somewhere that can be variously signified by our actions and therefore symbolically constructed or evoked, but an action itself. Space, I contend, is something that we do or that other people or even things do.

The argument that I hold is that we create spaces as we cope with the world that we live in. Our act of 'coping' is a spatial act, a mode of comportment through which we lay out what we want or do not want to do with and in the world. Space is but another mode of expressing agency, another way to bestow, obtain or elicit meanings from the world. In this context, I prefer to speak of space as a *capacity*: an instrument and idiom that we use to obtain things. This quality of space brings forth and illuminates its inherent political dimension.

I support this reading of space on an ethnographic account of the dimensions through which urban space in the Chilean city of Antofagasta is constructed; specifically, the socio-spatial rhythms through which ideas about the house, the street and certain landscapes of consumption - a high street, a number of supermarkets, a shopping centre, a boulevard, a street market - are given social form. The ethnography shows the local people to refer their spatiality to the flow of social relationships and not to the material setting of the places they occupy (people talking of *doing* things somewhere rather than going *somewhere* to do something). My argument is that, in this light, space, far from a transparent medium, becomes the idiom or dimension through which certain people effect their agency

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CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	i
<i>Contents</i>	iii
<i>List of Tables</i>	vii
Introduction	1
<i>The Setting</i>	2
<i>An Ethnography of Space and the Space of the Ethnography</i>	3
<i>Getting a Hold on Space</i>	6
<i>The Findings</i>	8
1. One Hundred and Forty Years of Frontier Urbanization	14
1.1 Birth of a Frontier Town	15
1.2 ‘Working Out’ Frontier Space	19
<i>Labour</i>	20
<i>The Church and Capital</i>	29
1.3 1930-1990s: The Urbanization of the Frontier	37
<i>The State</i>	38
<i>The Literature</i>	52
1.4 Conclusion	58
2. The World’s Mining Capital	62
2.1 The Social Structure of a Frontier Society	63
2.2 Economy	71
2.3 Culture and the Politics of Identity	78
2.4 Modernity and History	85

2.5 Conclusion	98
3. Theories on Space	102
3.1 A (Very) Brief History of Space	104
3.2 Social Space	109
<i>Durkheim and the Anthropology of Space</i>	110
<i>Geography (and Others)</i>	122
3.3 Conclusion	132
4. Rhythmic Spaces and the Rhythm of Space	139
4.1 Spatializing an Imaginary City	140
4.2 Mapping the Work Fields (of Fieldwork)	144
<i>Valdivia</i>	147
<i>Gran Vía</i>	154
<i>Norte</i>	167
4.3 ‘Nighthawking’ in Ruinas de Huanchaca	179
5. The Rituals of Space (I)	183
5.1 The Social Life of Streets	185
5.2 Calle Prat: A Spatial Place	190
5.3 Shopping Centres and the Centrality of Shopping	200
<i>El Líder</i>	202
5.4 Space as an Outing	218
<i>Avenida del Brasil</i>	218
<i>La Feria del las Pulgas</i>	224
6. The Rituals of Space (II)	232
6.1 Fiestas Patrias	232
6.2 All Saints’ Day	253

6.3 Conclusion	260
Conclusion	264
<i>Appendix</i>	270
<i>Plates</i>	271
Plate I a. Antofagasta: view of the south of the city	
Plate I b. Antofagasta: view of the north of the city	
Plate II. Pampa revival celebration at the plaza José Francisco Vergara	
Plate III a. Ruinas de Huanchaca	
Plate III b. “Saltpetre Nostalgias” at the Ruinas de Huanchaca	
Plate IV. Groups of <i>taquillas</i> at the Caracol Building, Calle Prat	
Plate V a. “Anything-can-happen, anything-can-be-found”, Calle Prat	
Plate V b. “Anything-can-happen, anything-can-be-found”, Calle Prat	
Plate VI. Groups of men at the ‘social death’ of Calle Prat	
Plate VII. Avenida del Brasil, Saturday evening	
Plate VIII a. The Flea Market, Sunday morning	
Plate VIII b. The Flea Market, Tuesday morning	
Plate IX. The Flea Market, lateral branch	
Plate X a. Family stroll and shopping trip to La Vega	
Plate X b. Family stroll and shopping trip to La Vega	
<i>Figures</i>	285
Figure 1. Chile in the nineteenth century	
Figure 2. Map of Antofagasta	
Figure 3. Map of the south of Antofagasta	
Figure 4. Map of the centre of Antofagasta	
Figure 5. Map of the north of Antofagasta	

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1. Population Breakdown	63
Table 2. Educational background (% of neighbourhood populations)	150
Table 3. Wealth indicators	151
Table 4. Miscellanea (% of neighbourhood populations)	156

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the subject of space. The claims that it purports to make are not new. They have been made before and are today widely held in the discipline of geography and other fields of social theory such as postcolonial studies and radical feminist theory. They were, though, initially informed by a two year period of fieldwork. Only later I found my findings to fit, even, at some points, to move beyond the literature that these bodies of thought represent. This may, at first, be difficult to believe, for some of the conclusions that I arrive at have profound implications on what we, on a day-to-day basis, understand as and conceive of when talking about space. It may seem unlikely, therefore, for an ethnography to inform findings that seem so distanced from everyday life representations. And yet this is, after all, what social theory is all about: to give analytical form to empirical facts.

In this introduction I present the reader to the ethnography and its findings. What I am therefore concerned with is with justifying the transition that I make from the empiricism of social life to the analytical framework of theory. I will briefly talk about the city where I conducted research and briefly, also, talk about why I ended up studying what I ended up studying, and why I think that the theses that I hold are not unreasonable in the light of the ethnographic evidence that I confronted. I will also, for the sake of academic protocol, talk about the methodology that I employed. This said, my entire presentation will be short, for I am of the opinion that, whatever my shortcomings or my achievements, these will ultimately transpire in the unfolding of the ethnography.

The Setting

The city of Antofagasta is located some 1,500km north of Santiago de Chile and is capital to the region whose territory incorporates the Atacama Desert, the world's driest. The desert hoards a myriad of mineral riches (copper, nitrates, lithium, silver) which have, for well over a century now, provided Chile with its most important source of export revenue and which have been directly responsible for the country's industrialization process and economic miracle. Throughout the XXth century Antofagasta grew and consolidated itself as harbour for the shipment of the mining produce and as an indispensable enclave of Chile's economy. Antofagasta has thus witnessed, and itself actively participated in, the constitution of Chile's industrial fabric and the projection of its economy into the international trading network and the 'world system'.

I arrived at Antofagasta in March 1997 as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas (Institute for Research in Anthropology) of the Universidad de Antofagasta. On arrival, my intention was to study the city's social history of urbanization, tracing and documenting the process of constitution of a community that, in my view, could still, one hundred and forty years after its foundation, be referred to as a frontier boom-town. I had been told that the city suffered a serious identity problem, attracting people for its buoyant, mining dependent labour market, and yet unable to develop a sense of belonging and attachment to the city. "This is a *campamento minero* (mining encampment)", I was often told, "people come here to make money and then they leave." My first concern, therefore, was with the study of the collective representation of the city as a mining encampment and the problem of cultural identity that followed.

What was soon to attract my attention, however, besides and beyond the community theme, were the daily practices with which the Antofagastinos were appropriating and spatially reconstituting their city. Very briefly, what struck me about the social life of the city was the little use that people made of the urban structures available to them. Antofagasta is a fundamental enclave of Chile's economy, the 'world's mining capital', as the local power holders like to brag about the city, and yet it remains extremely poorly serviced in all cultural matters. With a population of some 260,000 people Antofagasta has only one cinema, two theatres, no art galleries, no exhibition centres, no museums. In a city that is over 30km long, there are only two streets (Calle Prat and Avenida del Brasil) that attract the public. To the foreign eye, people make no visible use of the city; the city remains hidden, urban life running along an almost imperceptible dimension. The question I therefore became intrigued with was: Where, and for what purposes, are people getting together? In search for the answers to this question I mapped out the ethnography of my inquiry.

An Ethnography of Space and the Space of the Ethnography

I conducted the fieldwork upon which this thesis is based over a period of two years: from March 1997 to December 1997, first, and a second stay from February 1999 to December 1999. The encounter I had with the ethnographic evidence was as much an intellectual and self-reflexive one as an empirical one: the longer my stay in Antofagasta, the greater my curiosity and interest in the ways that people constructed their spatial experience of the city. The truth is that I was finding very little problems in eliciting responses and gathering information on the issue that had troubled me in the first place: the frontier quality of the urban experience and the subsequent lack of identity.

Everybody agreed that Antofagasta had no identity, that it was an ugly and dirty city. Almost everybody had plans for the future that took them away from the city. Life in Antofagasta was lived as a mortgage to a better, future life. As my ethnographic inquiry advanced I thus became interested in what my informants did not mention: not their plans and their futures but their immediate present, their everyday. It soon became clear that the temporal horizon that such a collective experience prompted would perforce affect also day-to-day life: How would the quotidian be structured in a city like Antofagasta? If people were not relating to the urban, what were they relating to?

In this my new search for the quotidian, one of the first things that was to attract my attention was the multiplicity of gatherings and social occasions of which social life in Antofagasta was made up. The movement of people between places and gatherings was formidable. People came together to *compartir* (share) at an *asado* (barbecue), to have *tesito* (tea), or at a meeting of their children's school board, or at a reunion of a club or a *colonia* (National Club) or to study together. I began to see such a network of occasions as an alternative geography of the city, a structural mode of 'coping' with the cultural indigence (of squares and parks, of cinemas and theatres and cafes) of which everybody spoke. People were not so much relating to the urban as to themselves, to this incessant becoming of events that mediated their experience of the city. And the more I got acquainted with the flow of social relationships, the more I began to 'see' how the urban experience was constituted.

This 'invisibility' of the city posed interesting questions on the issue of what makes a city (or 'the urban', for that matter): whether it is to be defined by reference to its built environment, or to its social life, or to both (or none). More importantly, however, I was soon to realize that whatever a city's structure might be, I was always presuming the urban to *be* something; that is, I was tacitly assuming the urban to be a *structure* of one

kind or another. And yet this was, in Antofagasta, obviously not the case. There was an urban built environment, sure, if that is what is meant by structure, and yet there was no urban life, not, at least, as I had previously known it. I was therefore led to ask myself more fundamental questions on what is it that constitutes a space (here, an urban space), on the nature of the interplay between the structures and practices that allows us to talk of cities and urban life in the first place. Put somewhat differently: the fact that there was a spatiality that I had not been initially aware of, a network of social practices and social spaces that were not immediately available to me, made me think on how we ‘structure’ spaces that may not necessarily be ‘visible’. That is, what if space is not something that we have to deal with, where social life unfolds, but a secretion of our own practices and interactions? What if space is not something given but a becoming? And our knowledge and understanding of ‘structural’ or ‘fixed’ spaces is but a decision, on our part, to keep practising (a) space the same way one time after another?

As my fieldwork progressed I came to terms with the idea that space, in Antofagasta, was not a field or extension ‘out there’ but a secretion of people’s practices. This posed a serious challenge to our everyday understanding of the term but I nevertheless became convinced that there was only one way to think the city’s spatiality and that that was as a geography of liminal practices. (The revision of the theories of space that my rethinking of the subject led me to engage with can be found in Chapter 3.) My use of the word liminal is Turnerian, meaning a structural condition of ‘coming-into-being’, a “realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner, 1967: 97). Of the consequences that such an understanding of space may bring along (or brought, in the case of my ethnography) I shall talk about shortly; first, I will briefly refer to how I began to look *for* space rather than *through* it.

Getting a Hold on Space

This section deals with the methods that I employed to map out the geography of Antofagasta's social relationships. During my two year stay in the city I lived in three different places, roughly located in the northern, central and southern sectors of the city. This provided me with a perspective on the city that was multilocal, as well as allowing me to see how different social groups, belonging to different classes, constructed their experience and representations of the urban (Chapter 4).

Right at the very beginning of my fieldwork I carried out a series of social network analyses upon whose results I then modelled the rest of my investigation. I started by handing out to a group of some twelve people a number of cards that I asked them to fill in following some instructions. The people I initially handed out the cards to were friends and students from the university. During my stay in Antofagasta, and as I got to meet new people, I repeated the process, enlarging the sample of informants with people from varying and various backgrounds. In a gist, my informants were asked to produce a daily summary of whom they had met and where. The cards facilitated the task by structuring the data in accordance to the type of social occasion that prompted the meeting (work, leisure, visiting relatives, family stroll, shopping), the time of the day, the duration of the meeting and the nature of the acquaintance (friend from school, from work, relative, etc.). I asked my informants to fill in the cards every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday for six consecutive weeks. Four months later I repeated the process, this time asking people to write the corresponding summaries on the Monday, Thursday and Saturday of every week (again for six weeks). The information I obtained from the social network analyses enabled me to see who was seeing who, for what purposes and where. More importantly, it hinted at who was activating the playing out of social relationships

in the first place; that is, it pointed out, if tentatively, who was enacting and practising space.

On the basis of the information provided by the cards I began to conduct interviews and arranged a number (three) of workshops. I also conducted a number of life histories although the information I obtained from these proved of lesser relevance to the ethnography of the everyday that I was trying to produce. In all, the results of my research thus far indicated that the production of space in Antofagasta was something left to the agency of mothers, university students and children (through their importance in family life). It was on these groups, therefore, that I decided to focus the rest of my ethnographic inquiry. At this stage, I continued the investigation with further interviews, albeit I gradually began to give more and more credit to the information I obtained through participant observation. As I gained confidence in my capacity to interpret my informants' and friends' practices I gave up all methods of formal inquiry and left interviews and questionnaires for institutional occasions: when talking to local authorities, industrialists, etc. There is one formal methodology, though, that I made use of once my research was well advanced. This was a sort of exercise in spatial cognition. With the help of some students at the School of Architecture of the Universidad Catolica del Norte, I conducted a number of spatial surveys of the city. People were asked to draw a quick sketch of the city by plotting down those urban spaces that first came to mind. The exercise allowed me to see which places people related to with most frequency. I was also capable of visualizing who related to which place, whether it were children who first thought of, say, the local shopping mall as a spatial token of relevance, or it were their mothers who held such a representation. Of what the details of my findings were I shall not talk here, for this is something with which the remainder of this thesis is

concerned. This said, I will introduce the subject, if only as an appetizer that may spur enough curiosity to keep one reading.

The Findings

I have already pointed out that at the general level of theory I believe my findings to endorse the view that space is a practical category; that is to say, not a place or a vacuum where we stand and do things, not even - or not solely - somewhere that can be variously signified by our actions and therefore symbolically constructed or evoked, but an action in itself. Space, I contend, is something that we do or that other people or even things do; it is, therefore, a positive relationship. We create spaces as we cope with the world that we live in. Our act of 'coping' is a spatial act, a mode of comportment through which we lay out what we want or do not want to do with and in the world. In this context, I prefer to speak of space as a *capacity*, that is, as both potency and spaciousness, an instrument and dimension that we use to obtain things. (These arguments are spelt out in greater detail and, hopefully, in a more intelligible and clear manner in Chapter 3.)

At the level of ethnography, my argument is that, in line with what I have said above, space, in Antofagasta, is a secretion of people's practices, a dimension of social relationships. More precisely, it is a geography of *structural* practices, those of women, students and children. By this I mean that it is the social relationships that women, students and children engage in that provide the underlying structure to the city's spatiality. I talk of structural practices and not of structures because, as I have already said, I found no structure other than the search for novelty, for which reason I have opted for the 'liminal practices' label. This I found to have a number of consequences that I will briefly spell out next.

On the one hand, the fact that spaces became visible to me through their practice and not their structure meant that spaces were constantly being produced. In their search for novelty, people were coming up with new forms of sociality all the time. This was, perhaps, more conspicuous amongst university students, whose activities often took them to what, following Marc Augé (1995), I have called ‘non-places’. It was common, for instance, for students to go for a *carrete* (night outing) to the most extraordinary of places: to abandoned nitrate refineries in the middle of the desert, to remote beaches, to San Pedro de Atacama, a picturesque Andean village that is located 220km due east of Antofagasta, etc (Chapter 4). More importantly, the underlying liminality of these practices was not unlike that exercised by other social actors. This is, at least, how people interpreted their family strolls to the city’s high street or their shopping trips to the local mall (Chapter 5). This is, also, why I have chosen to label the practice of such spatiality as ‘space as an outing’, and why I believe people to engage with and relate to their social environment as if it were a ‘landscape of possibilities’ (Chapters 5 and 6).

From another point of view, the tendency, on the part of social actors, to organize their spatiality by reference to the flow of their own social relationships, made me think about how the idioms of what Daniel Miller has called ‘transcendence’ and ‘transience’ were constituted in Antofagasta (Miller, 1994). Miller uses the terms to delineate what he believes to be the defining trait of Modernity: an inherently contradictory dialectic between two opposing modes of temporality: the transcendent, an ideology that denotes an engagement with collective and long-term concerns; and the transient, a mode of experience that celebrates the spontaneous and the ephemeral. Miller presupposes or, at any rate, claims that in the case of Trinidad the ideology of the transcendent acts as a principle of social organization and moral life, providing coherence and continuity to the group. The transient, on the other hand, acts as a centrifugal social force, bringing

disruption and disorder to the group by celebrating the values of individualism and freedom.

Now, I do not want to argue that the transcendent and the transient are not valid representations of how a society may organize its moral discourse. Be it kinship, class, religion, or whatever, there will always be ‘structures’ that a group will recur to in trying to organize its membership. In this respect, the transcendent is as good a descriptor of a ‘structure’ as any other. What my ethnographic material made me think about, however, was whether the organization of a group’s social and moral life has truly to depend on its mode of experiencing temporality, at least as Daniel Miller had defined it. In Antofagasta, it was a conscious search for novelty and spontaneity, for transience, that inspired people to keep producing spaces. And yet the production of the space was often performed by a group that I would not hesitate in labeling as transcendent. The issue that I was therefore led to think about was: What if the search for (temporal) transience acts to organize social life at the level of (moral) transcendence? I use my material in Chapters 5 and 6 not so much to answer this question as to describe how this was actually done in Antofagasta.

There is one last broad topic that this thesis is concerned with. This has to do with the fight for the meaning of space that different groups might engage in. My own position is quite clear in this respect. Because I argue that space is a constitutive dimension of social relationships and practices, to fight for the meaning of space is, in my view, to fight for the imposition of one set of practices over another. It is, ultimately, to fight for the presence and actuality of my discourse, my people and my things over the discourse, etc., of others. This is, also, why I like to speak of space as a *capacity*, as something that people do to obtain things: a power that people play and map out. In the pages that follow, I illustrate this by reference to two sets of materials. In Chapter 1 I set myself the

task of retelling the early history of the urbanization of the desert as the history of its spatialization. This is a tentative exercise, and probably one more goodwilled than successful. My intention is to use the desert as a paradigmatic case of how the deployment and unfolding of social life has an inherent spatial dimension to it. The deserted and barren nature of the territory makes it an ideal scenario for my narration, for the incisive spatiality of social life there stands out immediately. In Chapter 2 I tell a similar story, if this time I describe the struggle for space as it takes ‘place’ in contemporary Antofagasta. Here my concern is with showing that space can be as powerful a discourse as religion, politics or economics. Moreover, unlike the former, space is a ‘transparent’ medium for the exercise of authority, its effects, therefore, not always acknowledged nor its ‘presence’ noted. In line with some of the pioneering work by Marxist scholars on the issues of space and spatiality (Lefebvre, Harvey, Soja, whose works I analyse in Chapter 3), my overall conclusion here is that the (re)presentation of space as a ‘transparent’ dimension is an accomplishment of capitalism (or, in Antofagasta, something that industrialists and the local authorities do).

A brief word, then, about how these issues are ordered and presented. In Chapter 1 I recount the history of the spatialization of the desert of Atacama and the social history of Antofagasta’s urbanization. My argument here is that the history of the region can be read as the history of the struggle for the imposition of meaning to the desert’s space - it is the history of the making of a capacity out of the desert’s capaciousness.

In Chapter 2, as it has already been noted, my aim is to trace the links between the structural forms and cultural formations that make up the socio-economic system of present day Antofagasta. To do so, I embark on the task of mapping out the cultural politics of identity that have been put in motion by the local powerholders and attempt to single out the idioms through which this has been done.

Chapter 3 is a critical review of previous work on the nature of space and spatiality. At the same time as I review what others have said on the nature of space I modestly advance what my own conclusions on the subject are. My definition of space as a *capacity* aims at underscoring the inherently practical, and therefore political, dimension of the term. Space, I argue, is but another mode of expressing agency, another way to bestow, obtain or elicit meanings from the world. Very little in my argumentation is new, so the chapter aims also at charting the genealogy of thinkers from where my ideas (if any) might have come.

Chapters 4 to 6 bring forth most of the ethnography upon which this thesis is based. In Chapter 4 I introduce the reader to the various ways through which the inhabitants of Antofagasta appropriate their city. The descriptions that I provide will hopefully succeed in familiarising the reader with the structure of everyday life in Antofagasta by acquainting him with the social flows that shape the city, in particular with the activities of women and university students.

In Chapter 5 I talk about what I have called ‘structural’ urban life, meaning the social life of those spaces that play a permanent part in the organization of everyday life in Antofagasta. I introduce the chapter, however, by way of a brief analysis of the social life of streets in the city. My argument here is that the street, in many important respects, epitomizes the desert, the wilderness, that which is uncivilized and pre-modern. The effect that this has on the spatiality of social practices is something that the rest of the chapter then goes on to explore.

Chapter 6 follows up the explorations on the nature of space in Antofagasta by focusing on what a number of annual events have in common with the spatiality of everyday life. In line with what I argue in Chapter 5, my conclusion here is that the

space of these events is something that people go out and *do* rather than simply take possession of.

Each chapter comes with its own summary and conclusion. I say this because it is only in the form of a general recapitulation of the thesis' most important arguments and contentions that I provide a Conclusion for the work as a whole. The Conclusion is therefore short, but it is here that the ideas that I hold and the claims that I make are most forcefully made and straightforwardly presented.

These are, broadly, the issues that this thesis is concerned with. My ultimate goal, however, would be to open anthropology to space. For I am of the opinion that space is not just something we should think *about* but something we ought to think *with*. The pages that follow are an attempt to think in such terms.

CHAPTER ONE

ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY YEARS OF FRONTIER URBANIZATION

In 1893 Frederick Jason Turner read his now famous essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” to the American Historical Association. The paper has since been regarded by some as the most important ever presented to a historical audience (Hennessy, 1978: 8). In it, Turner portrayed the frontier as the ever-moving line of the colonizing enterprise. Frontier colonization consisted of the ‘opening up’ of territory whose establishment and dwelling would gradually give way to other, often more complex (the presuppositions of his thought were evolutionary) patterns of settlement, be they farming estates or urban areas. As such, the history of the frontier was interpreted as episodic, a succession of stages in a progressive sequence of economic contingencies. “[The] frontier as an extension of the national space economy has a finite temporal connotation... Once fully incorporated into the national space economy, there is little to remind one of the frontier past” (Browder and Godfrey, 1997: 86). The Turnerian frontier is therefore, ultimately, an economic concept: “The history of frontier expansion in the Americas is the history of the expansion of European capitalism into non-European areas” (Hennessy, 1978: 22). The urbanization of Turner’s frontier was an effort too in societal development: for Turner, American democracy and the American character were the distinctive outcomes of the frontier odyssey.

In chapter one I set out to re-examine the Turnerian notion of the frontier. This said, my interest in Turner and his concept is only peripheral. I think that his idea of a frontier society can be usefully transplanted to Antofagasta, and that an analytical usage can be made of it that is both diachronic and synchronic. But this is as far as my reappraisal and

use of Turner goes. My engagement with his ideas is only tangential, for I do not stand to make claims towards the revision of his historical thought. I do this because my concern is not with criticising or evaluating Turner but with understanding a society that I view as liminal (that is, frontier-like) and yet completely urbanized (in Turner's evolutionary sense).

As I see it, most of the objections raised to Turner's propositions either bring attention to what his theory left aside, or highlight the contradictions in his thought (Hennessy, 1978; Browder and Godfrey, 1997). I view my project as somewhat different. I intend to argue that there is another *kind* of frontier settlement: the frontier *society*. Frontier society may be seen as dependent on, yet ultimately irreducible to, the industrialization and urbanization moments which frame its development. I employ the notion of frontier society as a cue to represent and understand the social history of urbanization of Antofagasta. In seeking to define Antofagasta as a frontier city, what I am after is to reflect and give historical accountability of a social formation whose fluid, almost liquid structure, has kept redefining itself as, literally, a city 'in the making'. For me, therefore, there is a stark difference between the urbanization of the frontier and frontier urbanization. The social history of Antofagasta is, here, that of one hundred and forty years of frontier urbanization. In this first chapter, therefore, I am not so much concerned with recounting its urbanization process as with mapping out its frontier status. I am here, following Soja (1996), spatializing history rather than historicizing space.

1.1 Birth of a Frontier Town

Antofagasta, or the ‘village of the great saltlake’, as it translates from the original Quechua, was founded as a frontier settlement in the quest for precious or base metals that swept the Atacama Desert during the colonial period and, most significantly, throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1866, the year our story begins, Bolivia and Chile agreed to share equally in the customs receipts from the region between 23° and 25° south latitude, which stretches across a body of land close to half of that of the desert. This agreement put momentarily to rest Chile’s diplomacy which, for reasons that shall be soon made clear, had long been pressing Bolivia for a relocation of the border line as far north as 23° south latitude. This most arid of lands was seen at the time as an unkind and barren territory, which explains why an issue over territorial sovereignty was somehow tacitly accepted by the Bolivians to be left unsettled.

There was a reason to Chile’s insistent claims. North of the Loa river, where the Atacama Desert changes name and becomes the Pampa del Tamarugal, in the Peruvian province of Tarapacá, the wasteland’s surface had been torn apart and its riches exposed. The discovery of nitrate deposits in the region had fueled a thriving industry in Peru, with Chilean (hence the diplomatic manoeuvring) and European capitalists engaged in intense competition for them because of their use as chemical fertilizers in European agriculture.

On December 1866, the year the treaty was signed, a Chilean entrepreneur, José Santos Ossa, organized an expedition to the region south of the Loa river with a view to surveying the territory for saltpetre ores of the kind which were being profitably exploited in Tarapacá. Ossa found saltpetre not too far away from the coast, off the peninsula of Mejillones, where *guano* - a natural, organic fertilizer - had been exploited for some time, and named the area where the mineral bed was located *Salar del Carmen*.

With the exploitation of the site in mind, Ossa and his business partner Francisco Puelma secured generous concessions from the Bolivian government. The concessions were coterminous to the settlement of La Chimba, an insignificant coastal hamlet close to the Salar which was to be used by Ossa for the shipment of his first cargo. On October 22, 1868, the Bolivian government sanctioned La Chimba's foundation, by then a lively and busy community of some 400 people (Bermúdez Miral, 1966).

The allure of speculative mining ventures was formidable. When Ossa arrived to La Chimba in 1866 he found the inlet to be already inhabited by Juan López, a mysterious mine hunter whose figure is close to mythical in local historiography. López was not alone, however, in his ardent hunt for El Dorado. The discovery of *guano* and saltpetre, and, before that, of Chañarcillo's silver deposits in 1832, had sparked an ongoing interest in surveying and prospecting the desert for new sources of mineral wealth. The permanent basis of much commercial activity that was taking place in La Chimba encouraged a good number of *cateadores* (mine-hunters) to search the desert for *salitreras* (saltpetre ores) and other mineral deposits (gold, silver, copper) using the inlet as their operational base. In one such expedition, José Díaz Gana discovered the 'silver hills' of Caracoles. In the space of days hundreds of miners and treasure hunters rushed to La Chimba. The inlet became the point of departure for feverish entrepreneurial activities; a resting and leisure camp for mine hunters and mine workers; a market for traders, speculators and financiers zealously in search of the riches' trail. And with them, there came shipments of food, machinery and animal stock. Such a sudden increase in harbour activity pushed the Bolivian government to upgrade La Chimba's status to Minor Port on May 8, 1871, which, in turn, led to further growth (Bermúdez Miral, 1966: 82).

It is not clear when the change of name from La Chimba to Antofagasta took effect. It is known that Mariano Melgarejo, the Bolivian dictator, ordered the change for he wished the inlet to be named after an agricultural estate he owned. Speculations as to the exact dates vary from as early as 1869 to as late as 1871 (Bermúdez Miral, 1966). Under one name or another, however, the frenzied expansion of the mining industry brought the inlet to the foreground of capitalist manoeuvring. A wave of humanity hit the port and Antofagasta/La Chimba became a frontier boom town, exposed to and saturated with the shifting, contradictory and ambiguous traits of life on the margins - an effervescent liminal society.

By the mid 1870s, Ossa's original concern had turned into the *Compañía de Salitre y Ferrocarril de Antofagasta* (Antofagasta Nitrate and Railway Company), now an all-mighty Chilean-British corporation. The spread of the company's interests and operations throughout the region, starting with the deployment of a railway network connecting Antofagasta with its hinterland *oficinas* (nitrate refineries), was seen quite rightly by the Bolivian government as a ploy to denationalize its desert province. Yet the Chileans were but playing with the ambivalences of their 1866 pact with Bolivia. It is true that the agreement had been superseded by a new treaty in 1874 whereby Chile acknowledged a boundary at 24° south latitude and Bolivia, in return, promised not to tax the Chilean industries in the area. But "by 1874, 93 percent of the population of Antofagasta... was Chilean... Even its formal control was being challenged by Chilean secret societies whose goal was union with Chile" (O'Brien, 1982: 49). Given this state of affairs Bolivia sought to regain control of the situation by imposing an export duty on the Antofagasta Nitrate and Railway Company in 1878. The die was cast. The refusal of the corporation to pay up brought Bolivian threats of an embargo to which Chile responded by sending a naval force to seize Antofagasta in February 1879. The conflict

was to escalate when Chile urged Peru to define its position knowing that the latter had signed a secret defensive alliance with Bolivia back in 1873. On April 5 1879, Chile declared war on the two countries.

The War of the Pacific lasted four years. Chile came out of the war victorious, with new territories (Tarapacá and Antofagasta) and new riches with which to face the future (Figure 1).

1.2 ‘Working Out’ Frontier Space (1870 - 1930)

The War of the Pacific brought public attention to the desert. Not that this rich territory had previously passed unnoticed, of course. But one thing was to cash the monies which the soil rendered and another, quite different, to engage in bloodshed, as a newspaper put it then, over “places... which could have been left alone without compromising the cause of Chile” (cited in Collier and Sater, 1996: 136). There was a need, therefore, to spatialize the desert, to map it out. Yet this was no cartographic venture. The task was of another kind. A social space had to be produced that, in time, would justify having compromised the cause of Chile.

Who was going to take up the construction of such a space? Whose interests would be played out? I have identified five main actors: the Church, Capital, Labour, the State, and what I shall call the Literature. From 1870 to 1930 the struggle for the imposition of spatial values was fought by the first three. From the 1930s onwards the State and the Literature were to take the reins. I shall now take up the discussion of the different ways in which Labour, the Church and Capital confronted the task of spatializing the frontier and leave for the next section the presentation of the roles played by the State and the Literature.

Labour

The first decade of the twentieth century saw an awakening of the *cuestión social* (social question) in Chile, a movement of social unrest aimed at rebalancing the structure of income inequalities modelled by the oligarchy during the colonial period. The social question reverberated through all dimensions of society. Militant labour movements emerged as actors on the Chilean political scene (it was in this period that the *Federación de Obreros de Chile* (Federation of Chilean Workers, 1909), the *Partido Obrero Socialista* (Socialist Workers Party, 1912), and the *Federación de Estudiantes de Chile* (Chile's Student Union, 1906) were founded). But there were also women's and religious movements appearing on stage, with their own ethical, and by extension political and power discourses on rights, obligations and values. On this occasion, as opposed to previous mobilisations, the 'question' became an 'issue' because of the role played by the working class which the nitrate industry had given birth to (Drake, 1993).

The nitrate north, therefore, became a space of conflict, an arena, literally, of contention. The desert sand became engraved with the motivations and frustrations of the struggle. The young, still malleable space of the frontier became home and quarter to each of the opposing discourses. What spirit moved these discourses? Where did it come from? These are some of questions to which I shall now attempt to provide some tentative answers.

It has already been pointed out that in 1879, when the Chilean naval forces arrived to Antofagasta, the town was inhabited, and its institutions run, mostly by Chileans. For

well over fifteen years, therefore, the town floated in a sort of administrative limbo, formally dependent on Bolivian authorities (at least until war was declared), effectively self-managed. The social organization and institutional arrangements by which the town was being run compared starkly, therefore, to those of the Chilean nation-state of which they would eventually become a part. Let us see in greater detail what these differences consisted of and how they were played upon after the annexation.

Nineteenth century Chilean society conserved the structural traits bequeathed to it by the colonial period. It was a simple society: pre-modern class relations informed the *hacienda* institution - the great rural estates that were the social and economic mainstay of the oligarchy. "Within the confines of the hacienda, the landlord's control of his workers was assured by the forces of isolation, paternalism, religion, peasant attachment to the land, and fear of banishment into the legions of the surplus population that wandered through rural Chile in search of subsistence" (O'Brien, 1982: 80). Against this social and economic backdrop, life in the mining north offered an alternative of freedom and prosperity which few labourers were in a position to decline. "Lured by the prospect of well-paying jobs, thousands of men migrated from the Central Valley to the northern salitreras. Between 1875 and 1907 the population of the Norte Grande grew from 2,000 to 234,000" (Collier and Sater, 1996: 163); between 1893 and 1910 the number of *oficinas* in the province of Antofagasta rose from 13 to 68 (Contador Varas, 1982: 8).

Not all of the newcomers, however, were Chilean; Antofagasta became host to a diverse immigrant workforce: in 1907, the population of the region reached 69,972, of which 56,349 were Chilean nationals and 13,623 were foreigners. This was well above the 4.2% national average. Bolivians, British, Argentineans, Yugoslavians, Germans, Spaniards, Italians and Peruvians were major players in the ethnic kaleidoscope (Contador Varas, 1982; González Pizarro, 1993). Today, this tradition of ethnic diversity

is commemorated in the *Festival de las Colonias*, an annual festivity which celebrates the congenial cultural plurality upon which the city was built.

Yet life in the mines, no matter how luring, was harsh - the *pampa* was an unkind environment to labour in. The temperature extremes for which the Atacama Desert is renowned impinged with cruelty upon the miners. The mode of production in use at the nitrate workings inscribed its duality at all levels of the social organization:

While the managers of the *salitreras* enjoyed access to imported delicacies, the great mass of the nitrate miners had to satisfy their appetites at the *pulperías*, company stores which often sold shoddy goods at inflated prices. Some of the *pulperías* made enormous profits (sometimes as much as 30 percent), but, isolated in the camps, the miners had perforce to deal with them. Indeed, since many workers received their pay in *fichas*, tokens, or chits, they were obliged either to patronize the company store or to sell their scrip, at a heavy discount, to local merchants (Collier and Sater, 1996: 164).

Furthermore, mining was, in itself, an arduous and dangerous physical activity - set in the bare environment of the *pampa* (the Devil's handkerchief, as Andrés Sabella called it), exposed to its molten skyline and the perilous demands of an intrinsically unsafe industry. Until 1923, when a limit of 80kg. was imposed by law on the weight of a sack of saltpetre, *pampinos* were used to carrying sacks weighing 120kg. (Sabella, 1986: 43). Accidents were *el pan nuestro de cada día* (the everyday bread (stuff) of which our life is made), most of which, because of the lack of adequate medical facilities, were fatal or impairing.

The conditions of employment in the mining north's enclaves had a twofold effect upon the workforce: on the one hand, they pressed toward its organization; on the other, they nurtured its disorganization.

The nitrate region, social historians have claimed, became Chile's proletarian cradle (Pinto Vallejos and Ortega Martinez, 1990: 76). The mobilization and organization of the nitrate working-class took place in the form of *mancomunales* (labour brotherhoods).

Workers came together to struggle against deplorable working conditions and a contractual framework tacitly built upon a virtually enserfed, debt-ridden labour force. In Antofagasta, unionism, which assumed an institutional façade around 1885, coinciding with the construction of the metallurgy plant at Huanchaca, contributed toward the overall ordering of the city. The guilds and professional groups which followed pushed, along with their corporate demands, for the structuring and solidification of what they saw as too liquid a society (González Pizarro, 1993).

The claims that the associations were making in favour of a bounded society, of somehow encircling and enclosing the *pampa* environment, both physically and socially, had a moral undertone to them. For just as the harshness of mining favoured a setting upon which the realization of a collective consciousness was formed, the frontier became too a space of licentiousness and perdition, which workers would probe to seek release from the demands of their work. Yet, and this is the point that one can hardly overemphasise, because the frontier was a vacuous space, any assertion, be it political, ethical, religious, whatever, had a spatial inflection to it. People were not asked to stop doing certain things. They were being asked - more often than not, forced - to stop doing certain things at certain times in certain places. They were being asked to adhere to one type of space, to endorse the urbanization of the frontier. Of course, people do not always do what they are told.

In Antofagasta, for instance, *Coquimbo* and *14 de Febrero* were the streets that no working man would walk by inadvertently. They were “where happiness trembled in shades”, numbers 330 and 338 “celebrated [street] numbers that nobody ignored... These numbers constituted the sexual cabala” (Sabella, 1997: 136, 137). Lust and pleasure, however, would often scale up into other, somewhat wilder manifestations of indulgence, with alcohol-fueled violence then sweeping the town’s streets: “bars,

gambling, prostitutes, fights, and death... Blood ran often. Any incident whatsoever was reason for fights to break out and knives to flash.”¹ (Alvear Urrutia, 1975: 65)

If prostitution became an issue in the city, its importance was definitely not minor in the nitrate refineries. The ‘sexual cabala’, as Sabella put it, was here incarnated by *los buques*, the large dormitory wagon-houses provided by the companies for the single men. “Los “Buques” were inhabited by single men, their unitary layout circumscribed by high walls so as to restrict access because of the presumed macho character of its occupants” (Garcés Feliú, 1988: 81). *Los buques* were the site of sexual services, passionate exchanges and tragic relationships; but they were also an ongoing stage for the living performance of an existential drama, the odyssey of man in the desert, of his fight for life (Rivera Letelier, 1994; 1996). And there were yet further spaces within them: real-and-imagined intimate and biographical spaces of a socialist utopia, of family regatherings, of unlimited hope in unlimited riches.

The open spaces of the desert were thus mythologised as a land of opportunity and a land of license, of sun-burnt struggle and spirited naughty nightlife. Indeed, this was the imagery used by the *enganchadores*, the swift talkers employed by the nitrate companies to journey to Chile’s southern provinces in search of new waves of a strong yet ingenuous workforce (Sabella, 1997: 87). Those who were hexed by their incantations became *enganchados* (literally, ‘hooked’), expendable labour whose attachment to the industry paralleled the booms and busts of the market prices for nitrates. The *enganchados* were hooked when a rise in the price of nitrates called for additional labour to meet projected increases in production; they were unhooked during slumps (Bravo Elizondo, 1983). In times of crisis, surplus workers would hit Antofagasta straight from

¹ I have co-opted Janet L. Finn’s translation of the text (Finn, 1998: 97) which I find far more elegant to anything I could afford.

the *oficinas salitreras*. They would roam up and down the streets in search of subsistence, sometimes squatting on untended land, sometimes turning to petty theft. This permanent come and go of the nitrate miners would inscribe the built environment and inform the social structure. Antofagasta became a *campamento minero*, a mining encampment, a town whose infrastructure and services were conditioned by the undulations and variability of its floating population (Contador Varas, 1982). Both the *enganchadores* and the *enganchados* are seen therefore to play with space. Indeed, one would almost say that they were earning their living ‘out’ of space: the former, by playing with distance and the veil of mysticism and deceit which geography allowed them to infuse their stories with; the latter, by using space as a survival kit, moving around it in all directions, probing it, acknowledging it, denying it. In an early work on the oral history of the region, bringing together the life histories of well over thirty *pampinos*, we can find testimonies, apropos of the shifting spatiality of the desert, such as these:

I arrived in Antofagasta in 1911... After a few days we left for the nitrate refinery of Pisci. In 1914, the operations at the refinery were paralyzed, so we all left for the *oficina* [nitrate refinery] Savona. This paralyzed in 1921... I then moved to Chacabuco [another refinery], where I stayed until 1925. Thereafter I moved to Perseverancia [another nitrate refinery] (Aracena González et. al., 1972: 164).

In 1922 I joined the South American Company of Explosives in Calama... In 1925 I moved to the *oficina* Aníbal Pinto... From there I began to visit all the neighbouring *oficinas*, making a living out of the sale of all kind of goods. In 1926 the refinery reached a halt... so I decided to return to Chacabuco where I got a job as a boss at the Department of Human Resources and Statistics. In 1928 I was sent by the company to take up a similar post at the *oficina* Prat... In 1930 I had a concession over a shop at the *oficina* Ausonia... In 1936 I moved to María Elena [a nitrate refinery] where I stayed until 1960 (Aracena González et. al., 1972: 41-42).

The desert village of Pampa Unión represents *par excellence* what life in the *pampa* would effectively boil down to. The village never received official recognition, in the sense that its existence was never cartographically acknowledged. A decision had been

made not to include the village in any map of Chile's geography. The village, which came to life as a nitrate refinery and as such was abandoned in 1929, reached, in the peak of its production days, an estimated population of some 2,000 people. Legend has it that its streets housed 200 brothels. Pampa Unión has been called a *pueblo fantasma* (ghost village) (Panadés, 1991). What I believe of interest in the Pampa Unión case is that it vividly captures the image of a social formation which exists apart from its material setting, which is self-consciously ethereal, to the point that it acquires spatial significance through the liquid geography of its practices rather than through its cartographic representation.

The ghost-like character which has been attributed to Pampa Unión could very well be extended to the *pampa* at large. For the desert was an elusive space, perpetually realigning and readjusting its geography. People came and left: today an *enganchado*, tomorrow *desenganchado*; nitrate refineries would open and close and sometimes, the market allowing, would open again. The desert remained in flux, its space an incessant becoming.

A particularly telling and dramatic, for all its consequences, example of how the space of the *pampa* was used, and somehow, therefore, probably understood as something other than mere territory, is given by the episode of the Santa María school massacre in Iquique in 1907. The early 1890s witnessed Chile's first serious wave of strikes, which began on July 3 1890 in Iquique and quickly spread to the *pampa's* nitrate refineries and the rest of the country. Some of the mobilizations were truly dreadful, punctuated by looting, burning and brutal confrontation. In Antofagasta, for instance, on February 6 1906, the railway workers were massacred over their demands for a 90 minute lunch break (Sabella, 1986: 71). What characterised most of these mobilizations, however, was that they were effected at the local level: workers mobilized in their place

of work. That was to change in 1907. On December 21 1907, workers from all over the *pampa* marched to Iquique to demand a rise in their salaries. They concentrated in the Santa María school. Their resolution and tenacity were thought to be best harnessed by an indiscriminate and horrific fusillade on the attendants. Hundreds of people died: workers, women, children (Collier and Sater, 1996; Sabella, 1997). The episode is reported in Andrés Sabella historical epic, *Norte Grande*, where the march and the massacre are vividly recounted by a fictional character. I will quote the passage in its original Spanish version for I am interested in the use that the character makes of the verb *bajar* (to go down to), here clearly denotative of a positive mode of appropriation (of the desert). I will provide the translation in a footnote:

Era por “el 7”, cuando los pampinos “bajaron” a Iquique y llenaron las calles, pidiendo justicia pa’ sus vidas... El hambre les pisaba los talones... Era inmenso el coraje de esos gallos... ¡Hasta las mujeres peliaron!... (Sabella, 1997: 205).²

The march to Iquique was significant because it meant that the *pampa* was everywhere. There was no geographical confinement to the struggle. No distance was enough to hindrance and prevent the workers from standing up. Capital would have to come up with some distance other than space to stop the mobilizations. For a while, of course, they did: a geography of death. (I shall talk about some of the strategies that Capital employed to ‘fix’ the space of the *pampa* and effect the confinement of the workers to the *oficinas* below.)³

² “It must have been around “the 7” [meaning 1907] when the *pampinos* went down to Iquique and took over its streets, claiming justice... Hunger stalked them... It was huge the courage that those blokes showed... Even women fought!” (Sabella, 1997: 205).

³ It is in this line, talking of space as a source of social power, that David Harvey has written: “Influence over the ways of representing space, as well as over the spaces of representation, can also be important. If workers can be persuaded, for example, that space is an open field of play for capital but a closed terrain for themselves, then a crucial advantage accrues to the capitalists” (Harvey, 1989: 233).

There is a further, hidden dimension to the way mining space was ‘worked out’, one which often goes unnoticed. I refer to the way the gendered basis of mining spatialized both the *oficinas* and, perhaps more importantly, definitely more intriguing, Antofagasta. While men were working in the mines, women were working on the town’s space. It is almost certain that the routine of their quiet everyday activities sewed an underlying structure which provided some stability to the ephemerality of the frontier. González Pizarro notes, for instance, how the publishing team of *La Semana*, a catholic weekly newsletter, was formed exclusively of women. Or how the visit of Belén de Sárraga, a popular Spanish feminist activist, to Antofagasta in 1913 sparked the feminist flame and led to the foundation of the “Belén de Sárraga Anticlerical Feminine Centre” (González Pizarro, 1989; 1993). Women appear to have been putting space to ‘work’, rather than merely letting it flow. I am afraid, however, there is little more I can say at this stage about the role of women during Antofagasta’s early days for theirs is, for the most part, an untold story.⁴

The Church and Capital

Who intervened, then, to restrain such an untamed social formation? What methods did they use and what alternative spatial vision did they endorse? The Church and Capital did, each for its own set of reasons. Quite remarkably, however, their separate

⁴ Though see Janet Finn’s (1998) extraordinary ethnography of the lives of women in the mining encampment of Chuquicamata.

discourses were soon to conjoin in the institutional actions of what we would today call a Town Hall: the *Junta Municipal*. The Town Hall was organised in 1872 by a group of leading businessmen whose concerns over the city's bawdy and dangerous nightlife pushed them toward mobilization. Bermúdez Miral has argued that it was their actions that bounded and structured the town's chaotic layout, both physical and social. It was they who had erected, ten years after its foundation, the region's best managed settlement (Bermúdez Miral, 1966).

The Town Hall acted promptly and swiftly to upgrade the status of the settlement from that of a *campamento minero* to a town proper. Its actions, however, were directed, for the most part, to improve the town's infrastructure. And they were centred and concentrated in Antofagasta. Few people realised that the town's social system extended beyond its built perimeter to incorporate the hinterland *oficinas*. Antofagasta's was a frontier society, which meant that hers was a liquid social structure, undulating and flowing throughout the entire *pampa*, even beyond, to Chile's southern provinces, where most of the nitrate workers had come - and were coming - from:

In this vast and driest of deserts, there exists no settlement with roots: families are nomads... Chileans and Europeans are lured by the momentary aspiration of better fortune; others, because they are adventurers whose own misbehaviour has constrained them from progressing in their native land. In general, one should therefore consider these settlements as great encampments for labourers, of whom most are single and without families. The few families that do exist are always desirous of returning to the central or southern lands of Chile, or other more comfortable places... Under these conditions, the vices proper to the mining workforce and the single labourers prevail: alcoholism and prostitution in the extremest of their forms (Silva Lezaeta, cited in González Pizarro, 1993: 192).

These words belong to Monsignor Silva Lezaeta, head of Antofagasta's Catholic Church at the turn of the century. They form part of a report sent in 1908 to the Vatican's representative in Santiago. I have used them here because I think they vividly convey the image of a formless space, a vacuous society; a society with no roots, with no

project. More importantly, they reflect the discourse of an institution which, in denouncing the vices and problems of the region, was setting itself an agenda of social work and community construction. The Church, in Antofagasta, became a space maker, an organon for the urbanization of the frontier.

In the early years of Antofagasta, the work of the Church, as incarnated in the person of Monsignor Silva Lezaeta, became of fundamental importance in providing the town with an element of order, both social and infrastructural. In this respect, Lezaeta has even been regarded as a forerunner of twentieth century social catholicism (González Pizarro, 1993: 158-159).

In 1910, Lezaeta set in motion *La Semana*, a weekly newsletter aimed at “fighting alcoholism, promoting savings, stimulating meditation on the Gospel, and delivering an amusing Sunday reading to workers” (Silva Lezaeta, cited in González Pizarro, 1989: 188). The publication centred its discourse around three overarching themes: (i) workers, family, and vices; (ii) diffusion of an urban, ‘high’ culture; (iii) politics (González Pizarro, 1989: 190). The frontier quality of the town’s space made it ideal for intervention: social relationships were there waiting to be oriented and solidified, hence the emphasis on people, culture and power interests. But it was a daring task too, one of monumental proportions, as exemplified by a historical anecdote: the town’s foundation plan, as sketched by José Santos Prada in 1869, had allocated no space for a church. The clergy had to wait until 1872 for a place to be assigned to their temple (González Pizarro, 1993). It took three years of ‘floating’ around for religious practices to dwell in a definite place. The spatiality of the social had carved - and would keep carving - its presence in the city without a need for material settings.

In a similar vein, in pursuing his social catholic concerns, Lezaeta, showing a profound and unusual understanding of life in the *pampa*, put together what he termed

“circular and permanent missions”. These were formed by groups of priests and indoctrinated labourers who would journey around the nitrate refineries preaching the Gospel and the values of ‘high culture’ (González Pizarro, 1993). The *pampa*’s space, Lezaeta seems to have acknowledged, had a plasma quality to it, producing and reproducing social relationships sustained on ephemerality and plasticity.

I believe this moldable condition of the *pampa*’s spatiality can provide too some cues to explain the success with which pentecostalism spread throughout northern Chile (Guerrero Jiménez, 1994; Rivera Letelier, 1996). The ups and downs of the nitrate cycles, the migratory pattern underlining the desert’s geography, the ‘rootless’ society to which Lezaeta made reference, they could all do with a religion whose anchor was not the immobile temple, but the haphazard gift of revelation. Only a moving religion could map a space in flux.

In 1892, Silva Lezaeta joined the *Junta de Beneficiencia* (Board of Beneficence), an institutional appendix to the *Junta Municipal* in charge of running all charity developments: hospitals, orphanages, mental health centres, cemeteries, etc. Despite it being a publicly sanctioned institution, the *Junta de Beneficiencia*, like its parent establishment, was, effectively, privately run. Its actions, therefore, might have been imbued with the spatiality of capitalist morality, to which I have already briefly referred (the above list would certainly make the delight of any historian with a Foucauldian eye). Lezaeta, however, was bolder than your average clerical or capitalist doctrinaire and knew how to make the *Junta de Beneficiencia* tackle the issues that worried him. This is Lezaeta talking at the opening of the *Asilo de la Infancia* (Child Nursing Institution) in 1908: “Widowed women, or women abandoned by their husbands, an all too common ill in these desert towns, having young children cannot go to work, and if society does not care for them, mother and son are doomed to die in the arms of misery”

(Silva Lezaeta, cited in González Pizarro, 1993: 191). Note the elements with which Lezaeta drew his sketch of what life in the frontier was like: *fleeing* men, *desert* towns and the ultimately heroic gesture of women. He may not probe deeper into the reasons as to why life in the frontier was that way, but he had certainly grasped the importance of space in what made the frontier a distinctive social system. Men fled because social relationships were liquid, because the social structure was volatile; desert towns (note the plural) formed part of an unbounded space, the *pampa*, whose geography was uncertain and yet acknowledged; and women and children, well, women and children had sewn the fabric that brought the floating space together, that allowed one to talk of structure (Cf. Finn, 1998). There were, of course, other less subtle ways of bringing space into shape, of giving it, in Antofagasta, a nicer, more compact look.

Amongst those with an interest in uplifting the town's façade, and with the power hold to do so, was the *Compañía de Salitres y Ferrocarril de Antofagasta* (Antofagasta Nitrate and Railway Company), the all-mighty corporate son of the original Ossa-Puelma concern. The company, under one or another of its successive guises (Sociedad Exploradora del Desierto de Atacama; Melbourne, Clarke and Cia; Compañía de Salitres y Ferrocarril de Antofagasta; Compañía Huanchaca; The Antofagasta (Chili) and Bolivia Railway Company Limited), became a major player in the urbanization process of the region (Panadés Vargas and Ovalle Ortiz, 1990). Whether under its own name or through any of the Town Hall's executive committees, the company established an agenda of public works which energised the region while building a docile space for capitalist manoeuvring: the harbour's docks, the railway network, water pipelines, the telegraphic system; these were all deployed and financed by the Railway company. Writing on such turn-of-the-century capitalism, David Harvey has noted: "it was the transport and communications revolution of the nineteenth century that finally

consolidated the triumph of space as a concrete abstraction with real power in relation to social practices” (Harvey, 1985: 13). In the *pampa*, the Railway Company’s space, the territory upon which its operations unfolded, was metric: measurable in tonnes, kilometres, gallons. Distance was to be *accounted* for, the spaces between *oficinas* and the harbour at Antofagasta measured. The *pampa* would then be envisaged as a grid, a matrix of productivity and earnings. And space would become fixed as a financial asset.

The Antofagasta Nitrate and Railway Company was not alone, however, in the social construction of capitalist-blessed community spaces. Janet Finn, in her study of the copper community of Chuquicamata, which is located 220 km east of Antofagasta, accounts for similar corporate practices by the Chile Exploration Company, owned by the Guggenheims, and the Anaconda Mining Company. She cites, for example, a remarkable article by Harry Guggenheim entitled “Building Mining Cities in South America: A Detailed Account of the Social and Industrial Benefits Flowing from the Human Engineering Work of the Chile Exploration Company and the Braden Copper Company - Organization, Administration, and Conception of the Objects Sought” published in a 1920 *Engineering and Mining Journal*. The article should be hailed as a classic manifesto on ‘the spaces that difference makes’, to use Edward Soja’s phrase. Finn shows how both companies engaged themselves in the production and reproduction of a controlled labour force by means of a strategic “plan to create the optimum gender, class, and reliability factors that would maximize productivity in Chuquicamata.” This demanded paying attention to almost all dimensions of social life: “home and family, vice and virtue, and bread and circus” were all discreetly surveyed, their needs thoughtfully attended to by the company (Finn, 1998: 86, 92-93). A particularly telling example of the ways in which Capital set out to circumscribe and delimit the space of the desert can be found in the practice, on the part of the mining companies, of paying their

workers with the famous *fichas*, tokens or chits whose worth was limited to the economic space of the *oficina*. Each refinery issued their own *fichas*, that were then to be exchanged and used as the local form of currency. Tokens were useless outside the space of the *oficina* and could only be exchanged for the national currency at heavy discount rates. (The traders in *fichas* went by the name of *árabes*, Arabs, and were normally not allowed into the refineries, transactions therefore taking place in the middle of the *pampa*, at night.) Workers were therefore perforce attached to the refineries where they laboured, often enserfed by cumulative spirals of debts.

In all, Capital set out the task of compartmentalizing social life by ascribing values and places to each of its dimensions. There was a place and a time for everything, and the built environment of the *oficina* reflected it: the single men were ‘singled out’ in *los buques*; but so was religion, with the church assigned a place outside the central plaza, a practice most uncommon in the tradition of Spanish American architecture; education (library and school), entertainment (theatre, gymnasium, concert hall) and, most spatially conspicuous of all, houselife. The fundamental social and material divide in the *oficinas* was between the *campamento* (worker’s housing camp) and the *barrio americano* (American neighbourhood). The latter would frequently go as far as trying to reproduce the front gardens and alamedas of the original models - in the middle of the world’s driest desert (Garcés Feliú, 1988).⁵ By putting things in order and spatially sanctioning ‘the order of things’, as Foucault would have us say, Capital was thus moving a step closer to that transparency of the budgetary statement which assigns to each item an acknowledgeable entry. And a space was being produced which was but the mapping out of a financial vision.

⁵ I shall touch upon the issue of the social and symbolic classification of ‘green areas’ and the desert’s ‘wilderness’ in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The notion of spatial transparency is illuminating precisely for what it hides. Ricardo Latcham, a renowned social writer of the time, writing on the copper camp of Chuquicamata in 1926, noted the efforts through which Capital went to masquerade to its visitors the real conditions under which labourers were living. And yet they did little to improve those conditions. Furthermore, it looked as if the spatial differences to which the camps had degenerated were actually being deliberately perpetuated. Latcham's account is rich in examples showing the gap between the spatially transparent camp which Chuquicamata was meant to be (a perfect exemplar of a functionally demarcated company town) and the turbulent one which it actually was. The spatial transparency upon which the functionalist premise lay was torn apart by the liquidity of social relationships, whose practices respected no circumscription. Latcham notes, for instance, that at night one could find debauchery *everywhere*. Managers and workers, company lawyers and retailers, they would all indulge in excesses; and they would often do it together, in what it was a *de facto*, if not *de jure*, reworking of spatial distinctions (Latcham, 1926). But why would this be so? Why would Capital allow a disorder, of any kind, to run against its (spatial, budgetary, functional, hierarchical) transparency? The reason is clear. Capital needed the difference - call it poverty, promiscuity, violence, debauchery, drunkenness, prostitution, whatever - to make a difference. It was one thing to indulge in drinking and orgies with one's workers, it was quite a different thing to live in the same town quarters or shop at the same retailers as they did. Space would produce differences which would produce spaces to perpetuate the differences. And Capital would lay back and relish on the near-tautology of power and privilege.

* * *

Antofagasta became the site for the enaction and elaboration of a multiplicity of spatial discourses. Its qualities as an amorphous, structureless space made it ideal for

intervention, for delineating its contours; for shaping and modeling behaviour, expectations, belief and conscience. The Church, the capitalists, the labour organizations; they were all interested, they all had a stake, in the formation of the new society, in defining the grounds into which the frontier would take its next step. This was a multi-sited contention too. There were, at least, two great spaces to be bestowed with meaning, onto which to map spatial preferences: the city, Antofagasta, empowering capital by becoming the region's financial and administrative centre; and the *pampa*, the solar and mineral geography of labour's unrelenting struggle. But no side was entirely victorious in its camp. All actors knew their strengths and their weaknesses and therefore knew how to play their cards. The Church would organise "circular missions" which would parallel the industry's ups and downs and follow workers in their temporal meanderings; Capital would retreat and concede to labour the licentiousness of night space:

The company seemed to take an ambiguous position regarding these dens of iniquity [gambling, drinking, prostitution]. On the one hand, the company, gauging family men to be more committed to their jobs and conservative in their union activism, wanted to promote the values of domesticity and sexual morality. On the other hand... hardworking miners needed their release. The company's welfare efforts did little to interfere with life in the shadows (Finn, 1998: 97).

Labour, in its turn, would craft the everyday from behind the scenes. Theirs would often be a more subtle discourse, appropriating and discreetly transforming the structures imposed upon them. Occasionally, their discontent would spurt in streams of violence and overt protest. But their struggles were generally of a quieter, less ostentatious nature. They managed to find repose in other spaces: in the remittances of money to their far away families; in the imagined future well being of their offspring; in the sexual and intoxicated raptures of the night.

Labour evaded the capitalist fixation with and of space by producing a parallel geography of the *pampa*, one based in a liquid lattice of relationships within and between *oficinas*; a mobile geography, built on a structureless, rootless space. Space became a resource for escaping fixation, for reconstituting social cartographies, for enabling situations. By redefining the frontier, by mapping it out as a flow of social relationships, labour enhanced, to a point never dreamt of before, the (d)elusive character of the desert. In sum, they empowered space.

1.3 1930 - 1990s: The Urbanization of the Frontier

By dividing the history of the social urbanization of Antofagasta into two big period blocks I do not intend to suggest that both the actors and structures of one period ceased to operate altogether in the subsequent period. On the contrary, it is central to my thesis the idea that much of what was structurally layed down during the first period is still today articulating a great deal of the city's social life. I do argue, however, that a realignment of the balance of power took place. Actors whose contributions to society were almost insignificant in the past, emerge now as prominent power holders; others, whose influence had been conspicuous, fade away from the sociopolitical scene. The Church, for instance, has never ceased to play a very important role in Chilean social life (despite its actual separation from the State in 1925). Indeed, one could further argue that the consolidation of the pentecostal movement took place precisely during the years in question. In a similar vein, Chile's copper industry, which had entered, back in the 1880s, into an unrelenting decline of both profits and deposits, resurfaced with new impetus thanks to the 'flotation process', a technological advancement which revolutionised mining activities. The Guggenheim family (to whom we have already

made reference in regard of the Chuquicamata case), the Anaconda Copper Company (idem) and the Kennecott Copper Company all made massive investments in Chilean copper operations. The *Gran Minería*, literally “Great Mining”, the name by which the American-owned mines were collectively known, co-opted and reproduced the structure of social relationships which had infused with life the nitrate region. Labour and Capital were thus engaged in spatial practices not dissimilar to the ones enacted in the past. And the *pampa* retained its quality as a spatial resource: economical, for Capital; culturally instrumental, for Labour.

Having said so, however, I believe that no matter how salient the Church, Capital or Labour’s work were during this period their impact on urban matters were inferior to that of the State and the Literature. Or, to put it somewhat differently, it were the role that the State and the Literature played that shaped urban and community spaces in ways not seen before.

The State

In 1929 Wall Street crashed, the world economy suffered a historical depression and Chile stumbled. The League of Nations, in its World Economic Survey 1923-1933, described Chile as the nation most devastated by the Depression. “The value of copper and nitrate exports [the country’s most important source of revenues] dropped 89 per cent from 1927-9 to 1932” (Drake, 1993: 94). Chile’s nitrate industry was never again to recover from the downturn effected by the Depression. After the First World War, European consumers had begun to turn to synthetic nitrates, the market for which, by the 1930s, had definitely outgrown the long-standing Chilean monopoly. The damage produced by the Depression, and the rise of civilian participation, already noted by

reference to the 'social question', favoured an involution of priorities, the state thereon increasing in scope and extent its interventions as export-led growth was replaced by internal development.

The literature on Latin American urbanization refers to this shift from a central concern with trade policy to "political centralization and pro-urban development policies, leading to a rapid expansion of urban infrastructure and the urban-based state bureaucracy" as 'import-substitution industrialization' (Roberts, 1992: 52). The change in economic policy implies a movement away from the fragility of the international market and toward the firmness of a locally developed industrial fabric. Education, housing, health care, urban improvements and social security expenses thus begin to receive increasing budgetary consideration. In Chile, the measures had a de-polarising effect on the social structure, with the middle class gradually moving to the forefront of the social and political stage.

The effects of the new economic policy were also to be noted spatially. The directions for the implementation of the new strategy were passed from Santiago, whose centralised powers escalated by self-perpetuating herself as the head of all administrative and governmental operations. John Friedmann, writing in 1969, noted that "the apparent internal unity of Chile as a nation is... achieved primarily through the overwhelming power of a national government which, from its seat in Santiago, presides over a poorly articulated and dependent periphery... The survival of secondary centers in the periphery derives more from their ability to focus the attention of the national government upon themselves than from an autonomous, political will to manage their own resources in the interest of local populations" (Friedmann, 1969: 21-22).

The collapse of the nitrate industry further contributed to the spatial realignment of power centres by relatively depopulating the Norte Grande: "by 1952 some 54,000

northerners had joined the rush to the capital since the 1930s” (Collier and Sater, 1996: 292). The urban primacy to which Santiago headed had effects well beyond the realms of demography and spatial economics and penetrated other dimensions such as the collective attitudes and historical consciousness of the provincial peoples. I will use a personal anecdote to help illustrate what I mean here.

To back their account of the Norte Grande’s decline in the aftermath of the Depression, Simon Collier and William Sater cite some lines of a popular early 1960s song about Antofagasta (1996: 289):

*Antofagasta dormida,
tus calles están desiertas.
¿Cómo pudiera yo darte
dynamismo siglo veinte?
¡Despierta de tu letargo!*

Slumbering Antofagasta,
your streets are deserted...
How could I give you
twentieth-century dynamism?
Awake from your lethargy!

The foxtrot imbued lyrics of this song came to represent, almost forty years after its release, the cultural blindness effected by centralism over the periphery, what Alan Angell has called the “political culture of centralism” (Angell et al., 2001). The popular resonance of the lyrics was appropriated by Joaquín Lavín, the conservative candidate to the 1999 Presidential elections, during his campaign visits to Antofagasta. I myself was present at the two electoral meetings he held in Antofagasta in the fall of that year. On one such occasion I remember myself standing amongst the multitude, waiting for Lavín to come on stage whilst a professional entertainer filled the candidate’s delay with catchy political songs and jokes. One of such catch-phrases was a call to action, a promise to the Antofagastinos that, under Lavín’s presidency, Antofagasta would at last

wake up from her lethargy. I recall then hearing someone say that only the most arrogant or historico-geographically shortsighted of persons could dare to tell the Antofagastinos, whose region is today the fastest growing in the country apart from Santiago, that the time was nigh for final awakening. A choir of mumbling voices responded with approbation. This is what I mean when talking of the potency and prepotency of Santiago and its cultural impact on provincial life. Its importance should not be overlooked for centralism has for a long time acted as an overarching theme conditioning the way the Antofagastinos thought and felt about their city: spatially and politically disregarded despite their unparalleled contribution to national wealth.

The increasing role played by the state in economic and local political life can be seen to pin down on areas of greater spatial relevance for our study. Most significantly, the interventionist discourse inscribed itself on the built environment as housing became a leading area of concern for government. The importance of housing for the social and economic life of a developing country can hardly be overemphasised. Housing, in the narrower sense of shelter, provides the infrastructure for the preparation of meals, child care and home education, to name but a few services that must otherwise be paid for in the market unless they are provided at home. Housing is therefore a means for the production and reproduction of labour services and the labour force. In its widest sense, however, housing has become a tool for community and national development. “What is being offered now is a whole series of related but separable housing *services* of which the physical shell is one... Housing services include land, drinking water, sewage disposal, electric light, roads, transportation to other parts of the city, schools, community halls, shops, sport fields, health clinics, nursery schools and police and fire stations...” (Friedmann, 1969: 175).

In Antofagasta, the various *políticas de vivienda* (housing policies) set in motion by the national government distinctively marked and shaped the city, and can today, in retrospect, be conveniently used as references to map out and read the historical and spatial assemblage of the built environment. Antofagasta grew as new land became consolidated in the expansion of its ever-receding urbanized frontier, the so called *límites urbanos*. The city's material layout embodies the gradual flexibility with which the housing problem was confronted. The physical corporeality of the city, the consistency and cohesion of the built environment, languish as one moves away from the city centre. The policy concern on housing changed from being about the quality of building materials and architectural styles to that of the provision of the essentials with which to engross urban life - from 'the house' to 'the urban'. In 1953, for instance, the *Corporación de la Vivienda* (Housing Corporation), CORVI, was founded, a government institution in charge of enhancing the urban dimension of the housing problem. CORVI, in effect an institutional heir to the *Caja de la Habitación Popular* (Popular Housing Bank) founded in 1936, worked in conjunction with the building societies which the government had requested the various industries to set up. This was done with a view to alleviating government from all housing provisioning whilst, at the same time, committing Capital to the reproduction of its own labour force. A CORVI geography of the city was thus produced which can be read as a *collage* of separate housing developments, promoted and co-financed by the various guilds and workers' associations. The *Caja de Empleados Públicos y Periodistas* (Civil Servants and Journalist's Bank), the *Caja de Empleados Particulares* (Bank of the Self-Employed), the *Caja de Previsión de la Compañía Anglo Lautaro* (The Anglo Lautaro Nitrate Company Building Society), to name but a few, all financed the construction of their own *poblaciones* (housing developments) (Perez Catalán, et. al., 1988; Rivera, 1988).

Today, the *poblaciones* are seldom, if ever, identified for their old corporate affiliation; but their autonomous character is still recognised, their boundaries and location acknowledged by most. Buses, for instance, write their itineraries through *poblaciones* rather than streets; the space of the city through which they journey is thus chunky and discrete, coagulated rather than arterial. When asking for directions, to cite another example, these are almost always preceded by a *población* orientation; and one's house is always sited within the context of a particular *población*, this is how people speak of their homes: "I live in La Covieñi" or "My house is in Jardines del Sur". It is the *poblaciones* that are the units of spatial (re)cognition, not streets.⁶

Another housing policy which had important consequences on the city's layout was the *Operación Sitio* (Site Scheme) of 1964-65. This scheme was conceived as a credit programme which would enable squatters to purchase urban land previously serviced by the local authority (Rivera, 1988). The spatial demarcation which typically characterised the 'corporate' *poblaciones* was to prevail here, if under a different guise. Unlike the CORVI scheme, where the *pobladores* (residents) were being handed virtually free housing (the scheme slogan was cynically rephrased *casa CORVI, casa gratis*, CORVI house, free house), the *Operación Sitio* viewed housing as an urbanization enterprise toward which future dwellers had to contribute their part. The scheme thus served a double purpose: it delivered housing, on the one hand, and fostered a sense of identity toward the initiative, on the other. The view of the city as an ensemble of housing development blocks thus subsisted because an almost intrinsic consequence of the project was the evolvment of a strong attachment to land plots. The spatial substantivity of the *poblaciones* as urban units was now maintained by their value as identity tokens, as opposed to their previous acknowledgement on the basis of their corporate tags. This

⁶ See Pred (1992) for a discussion on the significance of the 'languages of spatial orientation'.

most literal of identity-building projects achieved its utmost example via the self-help housing programmes which were to supersede the *Operación Sitio*. Self-help housing became a giant do-it-yourself state sponsored exercise⁷. Its consequences were multifarious. For a start, the city, despite the programmatic efforts otherwise (that is, the house-to-urban shift in policy making), was consumed, so to speak, by the house. Because people were constructing their own houses, these became emblems for life-projects. But this was far from being an *ipso facto* positive feat. On the contrary, in the case of Antofagasta, whose image as a mining encampment was still operating as a collective representation, life projects were not, of necessity, terminating in the city. More often than not, people thought of their houses as temporary assets, shelter units which would allow them to save money to return home, wherever that might be, at a later point in time - a reminiscence of Lezaeta's rootless society. Moreover, self-help housing, insofar as it consolidated as a cultural and social response to the needs of the urban economy, began to function itself as a token of the urban landscape at large. People saw no city other than a capricious conglomerate of individual self-help housing initiatives. This is still today an impression which visitors to Antofagasta take away with them: the urban landscape is so irregular, so serrated, that one can only make some sense of it all by focusing his vision on the parts that make up the whole - on the houses. The

⁷ The notion of self-help housing is used to describe that type of accommodation which "always begins as a rudimentary form of shelter lacking all kinds of service and is developed on land which either lacks planning permission or which has been invaded" (Gilbert, 1994: 80). Back in the late 1960s, William Mangin and John Turner began to argue that self-help housing was a solution that worked both as a construction and a household unit. These houses were being built to suit the requirements of the occupiers: dwellers could gradually improve their living conditions - for instance, by substituting permanent construction materials for temporary ones - as they earned additional income or faced changing circumstances. As a result of this new approach to the housing problem, governments began to provide squatter settlements with the necessary infrastructure to formally incorporate such sites to the urban landscape (Butterworth and Chance, 1981).

consequence of all this was that whilst policy ordinances were attempting to enhance the urban as the unit of coherent development, social life in Antofagasta actually began to gain structure and unfold around an entirely different dimension: the house⁸.

Of course, there was more to urban development during these years than mere housing initiatives. Since the early days of the city's foundation, the distribution of population along her layout had been affected by the land owned by the railway company, which was right in the city's heart, a mere square away from both the central plaza and the harbour. The concentration of general financial and commercial activities around the harbour and plaza forced squatters to seek vacant land north of the railway's land. The latter thus acted as a physical divide which promptly split the town along class lines: north of the railway's estate, the urban landscape extended as an ensemble of proletariat housing; embracing the central plaza and spinning off her in a southward direction, high class residential developments built the urban environment. The divide is still today very obvious, producing and reproducing a spatial dual environment extreme even by Latin American standards (Angell, et al., 2001). Most of the urban developments undertaken since the 1930s have done very little to assuage this demarcation and, if anything, have actually contributed to its enhancement (see Plate I).

In 1927, for instance, the port's enlargement was approved. The new harbour facilities reinforced the role of the centre as business district thereby strengthening the topology of spatial values which the city already exhibited. It is remarkable, in fact, to see how one can trace the city's current 'social production and social construction of space'⁹ to a rather reduced number of selected planning decisions. Throughout the 1950s

⁸ On the social significance of the house and house life (what I have called 'the domestic') in Antofagasta, see chapters 4 and 5.

⁹ "The social production of space includes all those factors - social, economic, ideological, and technological - the intended goal of which is the physical creation of the material setting... The term *social*

and 1960s, for example, the *Municipalidad* (Town Hall) apportioned great extensions of vacant land in the southern part of the city to the construction of a football stadium (*Estadio Municipal*), of housing and operational terrains for the military, and for use of the future-to-be *Universidad Técnica del Estado* (State Technical University) (Perez Catalán et al, 1988). These projects have since shaped decisively the way the city is seen and lived. The amount of estate which was allocated to the three projects stretched over an extension of land which today amounts to something like a quarter of the city's southern district (for years, one of the university's major sources of income has come from the sale of marginal or unused property - their present holdings cannot therefore be equated to the original apportionment). The military barracks are particularly impressive: for well over three kilometres their domains stretch along what is probably Antofagasta's most privileged shore tract. In all, the urban developments referred to perpetuated, if not actually intensified, the north-south spatial divide which the city inherited from its nitrate past (see Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5).

These interventions on the part of the local authority were most unfortunate for the period was one of relative stability in population growth and would have therefore lent itself to a careful recapitulation of the town's growth trajectory and a reconsideration of its future avenues of development. As a matter of fact, throughout the 1950s the *Municipalidad* developed and implemented a *Plano Regulador Comunal* (Urban Regulatory Plan) with a view to ordaining what it then seemed an all too heterogeneous town, incoherent and unbounded. Most of the urban planning decisions of the period,

construction may then be conveniently reserved for the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and control. Thus the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space - through people's social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting - into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning" (Low, 1996: 861-862).

however, had to do with building a minimum of transport infrastructure which would help bring the town together as well as connect her to the regional and national hinterland (Rivera, 1988). The transport investments, of course, catered more to the needs of the growing community of industrialists¹⁰ than to those of the population at large. If anything, the 'ring roads'¹¹ that were constructed managed to polarise further the town's spatial division by attracting specific investments at each of their axes' extremes. More importantly, perhaps, by facilitating the physical means for intraurban mobilisation the local authorities were in effect opening the northern part of the city as a consumer market. This achievement, however, was brought about in what I believe was an unsuitable way. Once the means for transportation were available Capital made no effort whatsoever to access and establish in the northern *poblaciones*. On the contrary, they sprawled and self-indulged in their exuberant southern locations knowing that the *pobladores* had no choice other than come to them. This is today still very much the fashion, a living remnant of that period, and one cannot help but wonder how the divide will be overcome - if it ever is. Moreover, one is indeed led to ask whether there is the will, on the part of the authorities, to put an end to the situation, for a recent, most outstanding example of the kind of unequitable urban projects which have lent the city its present form involves the Town Hall itself. The *Municipalidad* has recently decided to abandon its present location and build a new, bigger complex which will suitably house all its operations. The opportunity, almost everyone in Antofagasta agreed, was a

¹⁰ The *Asociación de Industriales de Antofagasta* (Association of Industrialists of Antofagasta), founded in 1944 to lobby the state for better public services, has since remained a prominent regional powerholder, defending the view of the city as a service enclave to the mining industry.

¹¹ The *Avenida de Circunvalación/Miramar* and the *Avenida Costanera*. I call them 'ring roads' for lack of a better term. The roads are not circular at all; they run longitudinally from the south to the north of town. The truth, of course, is that the roads can simply not be circular because the town's geographical location cannot allow so: to the east lie the coastal hills, to the west the Pacific ocean.

historical one to readdress the social and spatial imbalance of the city. By making a decision to site the construction of the new building in the city's north, the local authorities would have taken a very important step forward in repositioning the town's centre of gravity. But they did not. Instead, they made a decision to remain in the centre, pushing up the area's rent values and distracting capital away from other area investments. Along the same lines comes the city's latest urban development project: a massive investment package aimed at redeveloping the 'old town' and enhancing the southern tract of the city's shore (see Gubbins, 1999a and Chapter 2). As if these areas were not developed enough in comparison to their northern counterparts.

The capitalistic undertone - that is, the persistent emphasis with which the (re)production of spatial structures of accumulation have been pursued - of the Town Hall's latest developments has a long history. The seventeen years of *laissez faire* attitude to urban development which characterised the Pinochet administration (1973-1989), are a close antecedent. During the years of the military dictatorship the state was confined to a 'night-watchman' role, keeping an eye on an economy which ran on the principle of the unfettered market. The neo-liberal philosophy to which the economy was subjected affected too the market for real estate, under whose framework all housing programmes had hitherto been developed. The private sector was thereafter to be involved in most of the phases of the housing schemes: from the elaboration of proposals to the buying of the estate, the financing, retailing and the old construction business which had represented in the past their only parcel of concern. Rents were also liberalised which, in Antofagasta, given the anything but homogeneous spatiality of which the city was made, immediately triggered a float of land values that was only to redeposit around profit enclaves. The city was therefore drastically respatialized and remapped, taking to pieces in the process the results of all previous concerted efforts at

coordinating its growth and development. Urban space, if there ever was *one*, was fractured and the infamous divide which was tearing the city apart grew deeper.

The military dictatorship that ruled in Chile for almost seventeen years did not just effect a change on macroeconomic policies but, more importantly, set in motion a pervasive carceral system of social surveillance and control that aimed at disciplining and modelling a new, cleansed, expurgated society (Moulian, 1997). To exact the purge the military knew that their tactics of repression had to reach all corners of social life. Moreover, they had to pin down and extort a transformation on that most slippery of social dispositions: the quotidian. The repression which the military therefore set in motion assumed, without them probably being aware of it, an inherently spatial inflection. Janet Finn's ethnography on the lives of women in Chuquicamata shows how space was also instrumentalised by society in its response to the strictures of the regime¹²:

In spite and because of curfews, censorship, and sanctions against public and private gatherings, some came together in twos and threes, perhaps to do ironing or care for a sick friend. Cautious encounters in taxis provided time and space for cryptic exchange of news. Through these fragile networks, they fortified their vigilance and strategized direct action. The mass mobilizations that eventually wore down the dictatorship were not spontaneously generated but the results of a myriad of practices... (Finn, 1998: 172).

María Elena Valenzuela, writing on women's movements during the times of the repression, has made similar points. She recalls the various ways through which women came together to fight collectively the dire straits of the early 1980s economic downturn. Their mobilisations, she claims, were not just mere survival strategies - although one should not lose from sight that as such they were born. They were, Valenzuela goes on to

¹² The issue of spatiality is never explicitly addressed in Finn's monograph. Yet her accounts are rich in examples where the spatial acquires a prominent relevance in the 'crafting of the everyday', as she likes to put it. I believe, therefore, that a spatial reading of her text is not only possible but ultimately illuminating

argue, subtle political manifestos aimed at challenging traditionally patriarchal views on the social role of women (Valenzuela, 1993). I would add to that that women's gestures were also spatially reclamatory. *Comprando juntos* (shopping together), a collective initiative aimed at teaching fellow women how to manage restrictive budgets, became a spatial endeavour, an opportunity to explore the city, to recognise it and repossess it. Women were shortcircuiting the space of the military by crafting alternative social geographies, generating new spatial meanings and thus redrawing the symbolic structure of the built environment. In sum, they were facilitating social change.

The military, despite the apparent liberty with which they had set the economy to work, were quite clear on the importance of controlling space, even if they did not expressly acknowledge it. Land, real estate, property; those were assets whose values could very well be determined by market forces. But not space. The value of space lay on the exquisiteness and subtlety with which it was practised, on the astuteness with which its flow was appropriated, its rhythms set. The military were clear about space: they, somehow emulating Capital's old tactics in the *pampa*, went for its fixation, for its reduction to a brute category, to a 'thing'. For to know space, to control it, was to 'see' space, to make it visible. No better way, therefore, than to having people follow a routine of wheres, whens and whats; to set a curfew and delimit the movement of people around the city. To produce, in sum, a fixed space, a space which was not allowed to flow, which could not, therefore, be played with, signified, instrumentalised. A silent space. But a silent space is not a dead space.

Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt Letelier, writing on the history of Chile's past forty years, has glossed Chilean society as a "subterranean" society (Jocelyn-Holt Letelier, 1998: 296).

of the complexity and resourcefulness with which the everyday was really crafted during the days of the dictatorship.

Following up Joaquín Lavín's analysis of the social changes that the country experienced during the eighties, he accords in epitomizing the foregone decade as one of a "silent revolution". Changes, he seems to be saying, have taken place in the shadows, behind the stage. Changes have been produced without anyone noticing; through the "myriad of practices" to which Janet Finn referred; through the silent space that they thought dead.

I think this is the key to understanding the Antofagasta of the 1990s, the one in which my fieldwork was carried, the one with which my study is concerned. The history of Antofagasta is the history of its spatialization; of the silent social processes to which space was put to work. Space, in Antofagasta, has been used to negate space, to oppose its rigid formulations. To every attempt at fixing the geography of the city, society has responded with a realignment of its spatial structure; every effort at consecrating a particular geometry of practices has been reappropriated and recast, allowing space to keep flowing, to keep rolling in its incessant becoming.

The tradition of liminal practices by which urban space is reappropriated and transformed in Antofagasta dates back to the time of the city's foundation, when nitrate mining activities dominated the region. The city and its hinterland have since remained an elusive environment, difficult to map out and to represent. Social relationships have kept redefining the limits and coordinates of a possible geography of the city. The people of Antofagasta, in sum, have resisted a fixation of urban space, a once-for-all configuration of its meaning, for it has been the use and reworking of space in the past that has allowed them to discreetly contest the various power discourses to which they have been subjected.

The Literature

By referring to the activities of what I have decided to call the Literature I am in fact referring to a selected group of literaries, writers and poets, of whom the *pampa* became a conspicuous breeding ground, whose works have had a long reaching influence over the geographical and historical imagination of the region. I am aware than in so doing I am leaving aside an important number of personalities (academics, architects, painters) whose doings would probably also merit the literary or scholarly label. If I have picked the work of the former for my analysis - a very brief and by all accounts imprecise analysis, for this is no treaty on comparative literature - it is because I believe that their productions have had a malicious, if by all meanings probably unintended, influence on the ways Antofagasta has been thought and felt.

The region's most famous writer, at least up until 1994, when Hernán Rivera Letelier broke into the national literary establishment by winning the National's Book Council Annual Award, has been Andrés Sabella (1912-1989). Sabella's writings centre, to a degree that it can almost become obsessive, around the *pampa*: the *pampa*, *el pampino* (*pampa's* inhabitant), *el empampado* (literally, 'soaked in *pampa*', by which he means 'spelled by the *pampa*'). His literary imagination has probed the *pampa* with a passion and a rigour (most of his writings are historical essays in themselves) of epic proportions. It is most significant, for instance, that the opening words of his greatest work, *Norte Grande* (Great North), are "*Pampa abierta*", open *pampa*.

Andrés Sabella forms part of a generation of writers, the so called 1938's Generation (Merino Reyes, 1997), whose ideological preferences and political inclinations were never concealed in their writings. Indeed, a look at some of the titles published by these authors can give some general sense of the strong social concern with which their works were infused: Gonzalo Drago's *Cobre* (Copper), Luis González Zenteno's *Caliche* (Raw Saltpetre), Volodia Teitelboim's *Hijo del Salitre* (Son of the Saltpetre). Their writings

set the tone for a larger national praise of the arduous struggle which Chile's copper and nitrate mining sons were fighting against foreign capitalism. There was a need, therefore, to probe and expose the environment of sacrifice in which the fight unfolded:

Pampa abierta... No es posible que nada se esconda a los ojos de la muerte. Por los suelos se ven los rastros del más duro tiempo. Y en el firmamento, el sol se descompone en una furiosa carcajada llena de fuego (Sabella, 1997: 17).¹³

The *pampa* figures prominently in the writings of Sabella because he is well aware of all the nuances of its spatiality, the saliency of all its possible geographical imaginations. He mythologizes the desert, investing it with Homeric supernatural traits, elevating it to the category of a godly kingdom, where only heroes can survive; take, for instance, the following commentary on the genre and style of *Norte Grande*:

The weight that the Pampa effects on the argument is significant. *Norte Grande*, by Andrés Sabella, in our opinion the most historically suggestive and of greatest poetic tension of all such works [referring to the 'saltpetre literature' genre], may be suitably labeled... as a *novel of space* (González Pizarro, 1983: 86; my emphasis).

Sabella's overindulgent treatment of the *pampa* - but not only his, as we shall shortly see -, if literary masterly, has, notwithstanding, been extremely damaging to the historical imagination of the region in that it chanted the virtues of a territory which was not real and could therefore simply not invest its *real*, historical agents with any of its virtuosities. Northern miners may have entered the popular pantheon of heroicity but only at the expense of their distancing from the real conditions and development of their struggle. And that, I contend, has definitely not helped to understand the resourcefulness and variety of ways with which that struggle was built and has therefore

not allowed Antofagasta to comprehend its past in all its subtle complexity. The mythical history produced by the region's literary tradition has cut off Antofagasta from a substantial part of its immediate past. People have few historical referents to which to feel attachment to because there are few ways in which everyday life can be seen to be continuous to a mythical past, no matter how close in time this may be. The city's cultural identity, a subject of great concern to local authorities, has therefore suffered - and remains suffering - from the burdens of too grandiose a past.

I have spoken amply on the work of Andrés Sabella but should note that he was not alone in his feat. Pedro Bravo Elizondo and José Antonio González Pizarro have both documented who were the various contributors to the *literatura del salitre* (saltpetre literature) genre of which Sabella was perhaps its most prominent representative (Bravo Elizondo, 1987; González Pizarro, 1983, 1990). Another such figure, for instance, was Mario Bahamonde, a contemporary of Sabella and forebear of the *poesía popular nortina* (popular northern poetry). In 1966, Bahamonde founded the *Instituto de Literatura Nortina* (Institute of Northern Literature) at the University of Antofagasta. Sabella also became a spokesman for regional literature and history from his professorial chair at the Catholic University of the North. Their academic positions thus allowed both writers to reach a wider public as well as sustain with, perhaps, a little bit more of emphasis their personal discourses on the poetic flakes of local history. Recounting one such episode of public commendation of nitrate values to which the writers often committed themselves, González Pizarro has written: "the impact of the "saltpetre phenomenon" on the collective consciousness is recognised in 1967 when the Town Hall commissions a mural to Carmen Cereda in order to "enhance the future municipal

¹³ "Open pampa... It is impossible for anything to hide from death's eyes. The soil is inscribed with the traces of the hardest of times. And in the heavens the sun melts away with a laugh of fire." These are the

theatre”, as Sabella would put it later, “with motives of the heroicity of saltpetre life”” (González Pizarro, 1996: 55).

The truth is that the *pampa*, with its naked wilderness and open spaces, with a scenery molded by cosmic encounters, rendered itself as a natural motif for the poetic imagination. It has been a muse, at some point or another, for most of the country’s most outstanding literaries, amongst them Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, Chile’s two Nobel Prize winners. Most significantly, its literary treatment has always indulged in some kind or another of spatial tribulation. Its timeless landscape has been sung in all forms of spatial metaphors, with its environment transmogrified into the purest of nature’s settings. Take, for instance, the following example, which I am selecting at random from a sample of Neruda’s writings on the subject: “There [on the *pampa*] is earth in its invisible diamond cut... There is the pure geography, fixed in a strange and abstract scenery, aerial and terrestrial.”¹⁴ Or, by Juan Gana, a classical example of the poetical rendition that the *pampa* has been subjected to: “Territory of gradual delusions, Geography tattooed in solitudes.”¹⁵ The *pampa*, therefore, in the writings of the poets, is a mythical country where ordinary men and everyday life have no role to play, no space to occupy. It is pure, it is beautifully wild, it is a pristine epiphany of original Nature.

With such antecedents it is therefore scarcely surprising to find local historiography enmeshed in, almost mesmerised with, a never ending pre-1940 archival exploration of sources and reconstruction of events. If there is a history of whose waters our identity should drink, the story line seems to be going, that is the history of our nitrate past. This, I insist, has had an enormous impact on the way Antofagasta has been collectively represented in the past thirty years. An ideological discourse was put up in which the

opening words of *Norte Grande* to which I referred before.

¹⁴ From “La Pampa.” In *Colecciones Hacia*, num. 87, “Épica de Antofagasta”, p. 5

cultural identity of the city was seen to reverberate straight from its glorious nitrate days. This effort has been sustained - and is being at present - at a number of institutional instances, from the local press to the regional government, from the local universities to community associations. In its own way, this discourse is as much interested in fixing the space of the *pampa* as have been the respective discourses of Capital, the Church and the State. True, the poetic space of the academic discourse, unlike that of its counterparts, appears innocuous, clothed as it is in nostalgia and melancholy. But these are dangerous tropes, which invest space with a forlorn beauty, echoes of a distant struggle that will too often refreshen memories of a socialist utopia, memories which are badly wounded after seventeen years of military dictatorship. They are mythical tropes in their own right, deforming the *pampa*, poetically distancing her from its liquid spatiality, what made of her a cultural and political resource, and deifying her social geography into an apotheosis of *communitas*. They operate a falsification of the region's history of spatiality and are therefore as counterproductive and damaging as any other attempt at fixating and consecrating one particular spatiality over another.

As a matter of fact, it poses a remarkable coincidence that the upsurge of the region's latest literary novelty, novelist Hernán Rivera Letelier (1994, 1996), has occurred at a time when Antofagasta appears to be successfully reconstructing its cultural identity, gaining new credit amongst its inhabitants as a pleasant place to live. Rivera Letelier can be adequately inscribed within the region's literary tradition, for he, as much as any of his predecessors, is too a *pampa* writer. In fact, if there was to be one among all literaries that were to bear such title, that would undoubtedly be Rivera Letelier. For he was a miner himself for forty years before he made it as a cult figure. Unlike any of his fellow writers' works, however, and I would guess that his mining past would have a lot to do

¹⁵ From "Estación de Silencio." In *Colecciones Hacia*, num. 30, "La Tierra, El Hombre, La Poesía", p. 6

with it, his novels are superb literary reconstructions of what everyday life in the nitrate *oficinas* amounted to. There is too an element of heroicity in his stories, but this is something that the reader is left to distil himself from the narration and not something imposed from 'above' by the author. The *pampinos* are portrayed as humble heroic figures not because of the environment they inhabited, nor because of the grandiosity of their class struggle, but because of the daily sacrifices with which they constructed the quotidian. Through his work, Rivera Letelier has reconquered and made available as a historical referent, if under a literary guise, a portion of the region's past to which people can at last look back for the purpose of reconstructing their identity. He has reclaimed the *pampa* as a space where the everyday can flow, reasserting a spatiality of the possible rather than the certain, dismantling in the process the essentialized and fixated notions of space with which his fellow writers had previously mythologized the region's territory.

1.4 Conclusion

In this first chapter it has been my intention to show that Antofagasta's space is not circumscribed to the city but incorporates the larger *pampa* to whose geography it is physically and socially ascribed. It has been my intention too to show that there is no one reading to such a space, no one ontology from which vantage point we may explain the region's social history of urbanization. On the contrary, the history of its spatiality is the history of the struggle for the imposition of meaning to space amongst five opposing, and conflicting, power discourses: Labour, the Church, Capital, the State and the Literature. It is the history of the various ways through which space was signified, played with, instrumentalised, neglected, fixated, essentialized.

Labour created a space which would allow them to buffer the seasonal and capricious uncertainties which guided the international market prices for the *pampa's* minerals. They opened up space beyond geography and invested it with liquid properties, transforming it into a practical category whose structure was subjected to perpetual realignments. The desert thus became a flowing space, a social possibility; an instrument for escaping the rigidities imposed by market forces, a resource to evade Capital's invasion of intimacy, their appropriation of home and community spaces.

The Church maintained a similarly discursive position on the possibilities of space. There was, certainly, a moralistic undertone to their spatial strategies, one which aimed at consecrating a particular spatial order; but some of the institution's leading figures appreciated the plasticity with which Labour was working out space and imprinted on to their own practices a similar disposition.

Capital's space was, like the ecclesiastic, ambiguous. Their space was mapped in metrical form: it was measured and evaluated only to be monetized. It suffered, therefore, a kind of essentialization, of fixation. It became, as David Harvey put it, an abstract concept. But the fixation of space became productive only insofar as Labour would adjust to it, would consent to it, at least in temporary shifts. Capital, as we saw in the Chuquicamata case, was therefore obliged to play a second discourse, one that would parallel Labour's own spatial needs, if only to guarantee its reproduction and the persistence of accumulation.

The State's chorological discourse had a number of levels to it. It became, first of all, a nation-building exercise, uniformizing geography to a central strategy, a *centralised* political administration. Its effects were, paradoxically, the reverse of those sought. The political culture of centralism fragmented the country leaving the provinces in a state of peripheral neglect. Second, from the 1930s onwards housing became a major concern of

government expenditure and thus became a significant sculptor of urban space via the social production of the built environment. Housing developments were understood as community projects of which the provision of the physical unit of shelter was but one aspect of the initiative. In Antofagasta the initiative never took off as it was intended and the city saw instead a restructuring of urban values around the house as a development unit. Housing developments did have an important impact on urban space, however, in that they sliced the city into an assembly of independent *poblaciones* projects. Urban space thus became coagulated rather than transparent. People moved through the city by moving through a series of housing chunks, demarcated from each other by an array of spatial and symbolic landmarks.

State policies had a further consequence in that by physically inscribing the built environment with a symbolic discourse they were at the same time producing a specific arrangement of social relationships. Moreover, the built environment then became an area of spatial negotiation with people reappropriating their medium and subtlety redrawing and redefining its symbolic contours and spatial meanings. This was most conspicuous during the military dictatorship, when a carceral system of spatial surveillance and ordainment became discreetly transformed through the apparently quiet practice of everyday life.

Last, the Literature, with their poetic view of local history, practised a sacralization of space. They elevated the space of the *pampa* to the status of a museum of martyrdom. Their beautiful and bland discourses were all but innocuous. They effected a distorted reading of history, aggrandizing the scale of a struggle which, if real and on occasions certainly epic (eg. the Santa María de Iquique massacre), was most often than not an everyday affair, silent and quiet like only the quotidian can be.

In all, it has been my intention to show how space in Antofagasta is anything but a given structure. How its constitution has been contended and disputed. I have opted for labeling the city's social system, whose spatiality is characterised by such a flow of forms, such a liquid structure, as a *frontier society*. The urbanization of the frontier, I have argued, its integration into the overarching space of the national economy, does not, of necessity, have to dismantle the frontier society. This first chapter is therefore an attempt to defend the thesis that frontier urbanization, that is, the social history of urbanization of a frontier society, is not incompatible with, nor reducible to, the urbanization of the frontier.

Moreover, this chapter has also concerned itself with showing how, whether we are or not aware of it, all social practices have an inherent spatial inflection to them. Space is therefore something that we may naively play with, neglect, manipulate, instrumentalise, sacralize, secularize; we may do one thing or another with space but whatever that it is we do with it we will always be *doing* something. Space is therefore a social *possibility* whose essence is its disposition toward a becoming. We are but a becoming of space.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORLD'S MINING CAPITAL

“The World’s Mining Capital” is the catch phrase with which Antofagasta’s local authorities are publicising the city in travellers’ guides and tourist agencies’ brochures. Whether or not Antofagasta is the world’s most important mining enclave the truth is that the city, insofar as it is the capital to a region that contributed alone 31.3 per cent of the country’s exports in 1997¹⁶, can be with no doubt regarded, in Saskia Sassen’s terminology, as a ‘world city’ (Sassen, 1994).

In this chapter it is my intention to draw an overview of Antofagasta’s current political, economic and social circumstances. The chapter is essentially descriptive. It aims at sifting that which, in today’s city, is a remnant of the past. In addition, by producing an account of the city’s current situation I intend to supply insights into the dynamics of its social structure and cultural identity, including a brief analysis of the ideological discourses through which these structural and cultural forms are deployed and produced.

The chapter will draw attention to Antofagasta’s utmost importance in Chile’s system of spatial economy. It will show the city’s, and the region’s for that, dependence on the mining industry and the all-pervasive influence which the latter has had and keeps having on its social structure. It will highlight too aspects of the city’s social system which have been persistently unattended by local authorities: the local universities, the role of women in spatializing the city and, through women, albeit irreducible to them, the all too frequently ignored but unexceptionable importance of children. Some of the

¹⁶ Unless otherwise stated, the statistics used in this chapter have been extracted from Gubbins (1999a).

issues cursorily raised in this chapter will be taken up later to present and justify my theoretical views on space as a practical category.

2.1 The Social Structure of a Frontier Society

According to estimates by the National Institute of Statistics, Antofagasta had a population of 254,730 people in 1999. Of them, 50.10 per cent were male and 49.90 per cent were female. Broken down by age the distribution of population was as follows:

Table 1. Population Breakdown

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Population (%)</i>	<i>Percentage of Men</i>	<i>Percentage of Women</i>
0-14	71,273 (27.98)	14.28	13.70
15-29	64,684 (25.39)	13.03	12.36
30-44	57,552 (22.59)	11.52	11.07
45-59	37,065 (14.55)	7.28	7.27
60-79	21,559 (8.46)	3.66	4.80
80+	2,597 (1.02)	0.32	0.70

Source: Panorama Comunal, Síntesis Estadística Chile 1999 (www.ine.cl)

Such a distribution is very much in line with that for the rest of Chile (see <http://www.ine.cl>) yet hides the fact that one can hardly find within the city a fourth generation Antofagastino (Gubbins, 1999a). The view of the city as a labour market and a mining encampment has discouraged many people from taking permanent residence in Antofagasta. This is a demographic trait whose origins can be traced back to the nitrate days when the city was hit by periodic waves of seasonally unemployed *desenganchados*. Today, the ‘floating population’ which circulates at any time through the city has been calculated at 17,000 to 18,000 people per month. This shows in the

flow of passengers to and out of the city, a figure higher than the average for the country as a whole (Gubbins, 1999a). Most of the visitors to the city, however, stay no longer than two nights (1.72 nights to be exact). Furthermore, unlike some of the country's traditional holiday resorts, whose passengers' flows peak dramatically during seasonal vacations, the number of visitors to Antofagasta remains constant throughout the year. This pattern has been attributed to the role that the city plays as a mining enclave: Antofagasta is acknowledged to be visited predominantly by businessmen and/or engineers whose services are called for by the mining industry (Gubbins, 1999a). The impact of such a 'floating population' is said to have imprinted the city with something more than demographic instability, as when the leading local newspaper, *El Mercurio de Antofagasta*, talks of a "floating city" (24 October 1999: 7).

Amongst the most important of the 'floating' social groups is that of students. The student body in 1997 reached 60,506, of which 13,000 were university students. Only half of the latter were born in the city, the rest coming from elsewhere in the province and the country. In fact, of the city at large up to 43.3 per cent of the population were born somewhere other than in Antofagasta. This quality of 'foreignness' assumes greater prominence when the issue of (inter)national representativeness is addressed. The 'ethnic kaleidoscope', as I referred to it in Chapter 1, is, again, a structural legacy of the nitrate past. Although only 1.7 per cent of the total population is foreign, the city's reputation as a multinational crucible is well established and much of what is done on an urban level carries the imprint of the various national communities. Today, the following communities have some sort of presence and say in urban life: the German, Argentinean, Bolivian, Chinese, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Arab Union, and Spanish Societies. Perhaps more significant is the coming together of the various communities in an overarching organization, the *Corporación Cultural de Colectividades Extranjeras* (Cultural

Corporation of Foreign Collectivities) which, once every year, on the fourth week of October, along with the Town Hall, organizes the *Festival de las Colonias*, a weekend festival held to celebrate the ethnic and national diversity of the city's population.

There are, however, other not so innocent players in the urban scene. Two of the most important power holders in the city are the *Asociación de Industriales de Antofagasta* (Association of Industrialists of Antofagasta) and the local branch of the *Cámara Chilena de la Construcción* (Chilean Construction Chamber). Their conjoined (for indeed conjoined it is on most occasions) lobbying power is enormous, to the extent that an urban consultancy firm hired by the Town Hall to design the city's future plans for urban development and renewal had to acknowledge in its final report the pernicious effects which the restrictive financial visions of the *grupos de presión* ('pressure groups') were having on the city (Gubbins, 1999a). It should therefore scarcely come as a surprise to find out that the AIA's current Executive Director had been the region's Minister for Planning and Development during the early 1990s. We shall see in greater detail what these groups' vision of the city is all about at the time of describing the regional economy. Let it be said for the moment that their practices, like those described for Capital in Chapter 1, are undoubtedly very important forces when it comes to spatialize and shape everyday urban life.

Of great significance too is the educational sector. There are 94 educational establishments in the city. Most conspicuous, for a city of its size, is the presence of three universities: the Universidad de Antofagasta, the Universidad Católica del Norte and the Universidad José Santos Ossa, a former professional institute turned *universidad* in the wake of the massive outgrowth of private universities with which the country saluted redemocratization in the 1990s. The universities are the backbone of the city's cultural life. The Universidad de Antofagasta, for instance, boasts the country's only

professional university theatre group. Movie goers, to cite another example, can benefit from the art cinema cycles which all three universities run. Were it not for these and other university sponsored cultural productions (art exhibitions, classical music concerts, jazz festivals, *pampa* culture revivals, literary contests) there would be no such thing as a cultural life in Antofagasta (sticking to the movies example, suffice it to say here that there is only one cinema in the city)¹⁷.

As I see it, however, the relevance of the presence of the universities for the city comes not from their institutional activities but from the part played by their students in urban social life. I will explain myself by way of some examples. There are a number of degrees (nursery, social service, medicine, psychology) that require from students the completion of periodical 'sandwich placements'. In fulfilling these requirements students are sent throughout the city, more often than not to its northern sectors, to get a first impression of what their chosen professions are all about. In effect, students are making up for restrictive budgets and a shortage of infrastructure and facilities. I knew of social service students, for instance, who helped establish, at the *población* they were working in, community libraries and neighbourhood gardens by raising funds from local businesses. I also got to know some nursery students, whom I twice or thrice accompanied in their early morning domicile visits to the *poblaciones* that had been ascribed to them, and witnessed how they would sometimes pay, out of their own pocket money, for the medical drugs of their patients rather than extending a prescription that they knew some patients would never bother to buy if there was no local chemist;

¹⁷ Let it be said that the city's appalling infrastructure in this respect (not to mention the shameful conditions under which the cinema is kept, an issue which has been unrelentingly denounced by the most important of the local newspapers, *El Mercurio de Antofagasta*) runs counter to the populations' fondness for moviegoing, second in the country with 107 spectators per function and two times that of the presumed cultural capital of the country, Santiago (<http://www.ine.cl>).

arranging for fellow medical students to visit patients who would otherwise perhaps need to wait for months to get a date at the city's only hospital; maintaining friendship and work relationships with former patients even once their training placements had terminated.

Perhaps more importantly, however, students are sewing an underlying fabric of social relationships that helps to bring together the divided city. By visiting poor and marginal *poblaciones* students are not only providing a much needed professional service but they are as well exhibiting themselves as role models for troublesome children and, more generally, reconstituting the spatiality of certain sectors that would otherwise pass unnoticed for Antofagasta's south oriented elite. The knowledge of urban space by some sectors of the student body is therefore remarkable. But so is their knowledge of urban rhythms. Experience has taught them when is the best time to pay a domicile visit if one wishes to find mother and children at home; when is it not dangerous to walk unescorted around particular *poblaciones*; how long does it take to move by *micro* (bus) from one *población* to another, which routes are preferable. They, particularly social work students, are also extremely well acquainted with the local distribution of power and the seat of leadership within each *población*. They know how gossip circulates, which *pobladores* are shy and which are extroverted, who is to be approached if one wants to find about mobilising the community; who takes pride in their work and their house, and worries about improving the infrastructure of the *población*. They know where about in each neighbourhood children hang out, how much time they spend out in the streets, how much time they spend at home. They know, in sum, how the space of each *población* is constructed, how different values are ascribed to different spaces, who plays what part in the ascription of values and how these are contested and fought over, or reified or simply neglected.

Very important too is the role played by the built environment of each local school. Schools are often the most conspicuous of all community buildings because of both their design and size. Along with the local *juntas de vecinos* (neighbourhood committees) and the *multicanchas* (multipurpose sport facilities), both complexes built and delivered by the Town Hall with each new *población*, schools are generally the busiest of community locales. A great deal of community social life converges on them. Not only do they provide an environment safe from the threats of marginality, but their infrastructure is often also used for extra curricular community activities, such as marriage and baptism celebrations, birthday parties, even, I once recorded, weekend film festivals. There is, of course, great variance as to the schools that do allow such reappropriation of their facilities by the local *pobladores*. It is the northern districts' state schools that usually stand for such practices of alternative uses. Private schools, if indeed very important too in their role as assembly points for their own body of associates - students, teachers and parents -, do not normally allow for the use of their premises in other than institutional circumstances or occasions (graduation ceremonies, parents-teachers evenings, board meetings, sport championships, etc.). Private schools are, almost as a rule, located in the city's south.

I have already pointed out the importance of the city's educational sector and that of some of the activities of students. I now wish to draw attention briefly to the way the school day is structured and the consequences this has for the constitution and occupation of urban space. Secondary and higher education establishments run on a timetable which very much takes up most of the day, a typical schedule starting at 8.30am and stopping for lunch at 13.30; lessons begin again at 15.00 and go on until 18.30 for schools, with no clear finishing time set for university lectures. Not all schools, however, run evening lessons: state schools tend not to, private schools tend to. Infant or

primary schooling runs on a rather less orthodox timetable whose influence on urban life, particularly on motherhood, is far reaching. These schools open their gates at 15.30 and are done by 18.30. More often than not, the division of the schooling day is owed to the limitations set by the availability of suitable infrastructure: the same school often providing for both older and younger pupils at different times of the day. The way the schooling day is structured is significant because it imposes certain burdens on mothers by obliging them to caretake, or arrange for the alternative supervision of their younger children during the mornings. It is not uncommon therefore to see the young ones accompany their mothers in the latter's morning urban itineraries, producing thus a space which is not only gendered but also significantly aged. The city's space is constructed *for* children; women move about the city looking for 'kind' spaces, they construct their itineraries with a view to shortcut or avoid dangerous or harsh environments, ritualising and structuring one path over another in their choice of certain streets, certain squares, certain *micros* and the times at which to use and move about these spaces (see chapters 5 and 6 for some specific ethnographic examples).

I have mentioned, at the beginning of this section, what the division by gender of the population is. These figures (50.10 per cent of men, 49.90 per cent of women) are, if taken at face value, misleading and of little use in appraising the structural significance of the division as it unfolds and conditions city life. This is so because an important proportion of the city's labour force, 15.79 per cent, works for the mining industry; and mining jobs, or mining associated employment, are occupied predominantly by men. Because all mines are situated in the city's hinterland, between 150km and 300 km away from Antofagasta, the industry now runs on a system of shift rotas whereby employees are shuttled forth and back to the city in work cycles of varying extension. A manager's work cycle would thus look something like this: four days 'up' in the mines (that is how

the hinterland is referred to, *arriba*) and three days of rest back in Antofagasta. Workers' shifts are far more demanding, however, with a typical cycle more in the line of twenty days 'up' and eight to ten days of rest. The system of shift rotas has therefore had an impact on the city's social structure that stretches well beyond its simple quantitative gender split¹⁸. In the absence of their partners, women have become the most important agents of the tactics and strategies through which Antofagasta is spatialized. When I first encountered the statistical split already alluded to I simply could not believe it. For women *appeared* to be everywhere. At all times during the day women were taking over the streets of the city, saturating its space with their presence and their practices: taking their kids to school, shopping, visiting relatives, sorting out and complying with all kinds of administrative, banking and judicial proceedings. Urban space is a woman's space and, through them, the space too of children.

It would be all too simplistic on my part to expect the reader to believe that the city's social structure is exhausted in the account and description of the urban actors which I have hitherto made. Antofagasta is a modern, contemporary industrial and service centre and the complexity of its social system will not lend itself to the partial and reductionist analysis which I have so far practised. The local authorities are very important players in the urban scene, and one would not expect it otherwise (I shall, in fact, deal briefly with them later); and so is the central government, whose political and administrative interventions are in fact enhanced in virtue of the heavily centralised regime upon which the country is dependent (Angell et al., 2001). There are also trade unions, community organizations (some of them the constitution of which is required by law, such as the *Juntas de Vecinos* or the *Centros de Madres* [Mothers' Centres]), student unions,

¹⁸ It is with the analysis of the spatial consequences of such a split that I am here concerned. There are, of course, many other consequences to be derived from the imposition of work rotas. On their effects on

charities, professional guilds, cultural associations, the media, etc. Moreover, actors, in complex urban settings, do not liaise with one another solely through one social dimension but, as Aidan Southall reminded us, are generally engaged in multiplex role relationships (Southall, 1973). A student is not just a student but can also be seen to act as a mother, and/or a daughter, and/or a consumer, and/or an activist, and/or a part-time office employee, etc. Bearing this in mind, I nevertheless stand to make the claim that the key elements upon which the particularity of Antofagasta's social structure is sustained and through which its space is articulated and brought to life are women, students and children.

2.2 Economy

It was said, in the introduction to this chapter, that the region of Antofagasta contributed 31.3 per cent to the country's exports in 1997. In per capita terms that amounts to US\$ 32,061, a figure which is ten times the national average. The truth is that, when it comes to its evaluation in economic terms, the region's performance stands unparalleled in the country at large, its growth and productivity indicators consistently outdoing those for the rest of the country in most areas. Only the Metropolitan Region, to which Santiago is capital, has a higher growth rate than Antofagasta.

The mining industry is the region's major economic player, a statement clearly proven by the fact that 97.3 per cent of all regional export revenues are generated through this sector alone. The region's mining industry is also accountable for 43.1 per cent of the country's total mining production, a figure in itself responsible for 40.9 per cent of the nation's GDP. Most remarkably, two companies, CODELCO Chile (the state-

family life in Antofagasta see, for instance, Figueroa Cárdenas et al. 1999.

owned copper company at Chuquicamata) and Minera Escondida (whose majority owners are the Australian consortium Broken Hill Proprietary Inc., together with British (Rio Tinto) and Japanese interests), accounted between them for 69.1 per cent of all regional mining exports in 1997. Mining operations do not stop at copper, however, since the region also boasts important gold (24.8 per cent), silver (31.1 per cent) and molibdene (58.9 per cent) operations, whose contributions to their respective national industry totals are indicated in brackets.

The worldwide significance of the mining operations located in Antofagasta has meant that the the region has become an important target for foreign investors. Between 1990 and 1996 the region attracted US\$3,342 million of foreign investment. This sum represents 25.8 per cent of the country's total. In one way or another, most investments are related to the mining activities, whether directly, through the enlargement of existing extractive operations or the development of new plants, or indirectly, via the construction of regional energy terminals (natural gas and electricity plants) aimed at cutting down the cost of supplying power to the industry.

As a matter of fact, the region's future plans for development, and the associated investment packages which those projects would bring, have recently situated Antofagasta under the spotlight of various national and international lobbying and financial groups' interests. The most important of such projects is a plan for the construction of a *megapuerto* (literally, 'mega-harbour') in the bay of Mejillones, 68km north of Antofagasta. The new harbour has been hailed as what will be South America's greatest Pacific port and its construction and opening (hoped for 2003) are expected to realign dramatically the region's spatial economics and social geography. In fact, Antofagasta's Town Hall has already commissioned a study on the alternative spatial uses of certain land estates within the city (specifically, the harbour and the grounds of

the Railway Company) once the Mejillones port becomes fully operational (see Gubbins, 1999a; IMA, 1998). It is expected that the Railway Company and the *Emporchi* (the harbour's management) will then migrate to Mejillones in order to take advantage of the economies of scale which are presumed to unfold there, the development of the harbour then leaving Antofagasta as the service and tourist capital of the region. To such an effect, the Town Hall is planning to spend some US\$103 million in the redevelopment of the city centre and its southern shore tract (for those are, ultimately, the areas that will become vacated after the migration of the Railway Company and the *Emporchi*) as an 'open mall' (see Section 2.4 below).

The construction of the *megapuerto* complex at Mejillones is estimated to cost some US\$800 million. The scale of the project increases, however, if one takes into account the associated investment packages which the setting in motion of the harbour will attract. The massive energy requirements of the industrial operations that will eventually develop in the area will need to be catered for. A plan for the development of three large-scale continental energy supply projects has therefore been envisaged. These are: (i) the Atacama Gas Project, a gas pipeline which will stretch for 928km linking Campo Durán in Jujuy, Argentina, to Mejillones, with an estimated US\$650 million cost; (ii) the Norgas Project, another gas pipeline which will run for 880km connecting Tartagal in Salta, Argentina, to Tocopilla and, eventually, Mejillones, for an estimated cost of US\$400 million, and; (iii) the Chilgener Project, considering the construction of three thermoelectric plants in Argentinean soil which will then be connected to the *Sistema Interconectado del Norte Grande* (the Great North's Interconnected Energy System) for a total of US\$440 million.

The portfolio of investments which has clustered around the *megapuerto* initiative has been zealously looked after and defended by the *Asociación de Industriales de*

Antofagasta (against, for instance, the mayor of Iquique, capital city to the Tarapaca Region and 600km north from Antofagasta, and once posited as an alternative site for the construction of the harbour). The industrialists' lobbying group can therefore be seen to be deeply involved in and committed to a redrawing of the city's geography of use and exchange values since the shift of all heavy industrial operations to Mejillones will change the role that Antofagasta shall henceforth play as capital of the region. The industrialists' vision of the new geography of the region, in line with that of the Town Hall, envisages Antofagasta as a predominantly residential and service centre. There is a need, the scripture to that vision seems to read, to make the city "more livable", to "equip it with hospitable infrastructure". In sum, to make the city presentable and a place that will not "expel people from it". On the other hand, if the city is to benefit from its confirmation as Northern Chile's main service and financial centre it will also need to "assume its mining destiny". Antofagasta is a mining city and will not "cease to be so for the next one hundred years". As a service centre of international import, however, Antofagasta needs to recast and reformulate its association to the mining industry. For "there can be mining without minerals". Antofagasta's future depends on the city being capable of projecting itself as "a mining meeting industry centre; as an international renown enclave for mining science and technology; a mining technology and science park"¹⁹.

The AIA has already taken steps toward the consolidation of such a vision through the organization of *Exponor*, a biannual international fair dedicated to the mining industry based in Antofagasta. In November 1999 the *Exponor* was held for the eighth time. The fair ran for six days and received a wide number of visitors, amongst them many Antofagastinos with no connection at all to the industry. In fact, during its running

¹⁹ Interview with Fernando Cortez Guerra, Executive Director AIA, 4/5/99.

period, the fair, because of its display of technological equipment and the flashy decoration of its stalls, became a favourite spot for some families' evening and weekend strolls - though not everybody's. Its location in the city's extreme southern sector, less than one kilometre away from *Jardines del Sur*, Antofagasta's elite self-enclosed residential suburb, hindered many people's access to the fair's grounds - public transportation to the fair taking well over one hour if one was coming from any of the northern *poblaciones*. The fair, despite its success from a political economic point of view, thus stood as a(nother) symbolic landmark (literally) of the spatial dynamics which are purposively restructuring the city's social geography.

The industrialists' vision is, it has been said, shared by the Town Hall in its plans for the city's future development, at least as they are embodied and represented in the 1998 *Plan de Desarrollo Comunal* (Communal Development Plan) (IMA, 1998). In broad terms, the plan talks of "consolidating Antofagasta as the greatest city in South America's midwest macroregion". The set of specific objectives through which this is to be achieved involves: (i) "consolidating the urban littoral as the city's principal public and recreational space"; (ii) "the articulation of new urban centres", by which is meant the need to promote poles of growth across the entire city; (iii) "revitalizing the old city" (a measure which appears to stand in opposition to no. (ii) above); (iv) "improving the deficit of green areas", which involves "changing the policy from one of providing small green areas to one of the creation of communal-scale urban parks at specific points across its plan"; (v) a move toward 'densification': from 74 inhabitants per hectare to 100; (vi) realigning the industrial zone into an industrial corridor; (vii) restructuring the city's space to enable the Mejillones-Antofagasta axis to outgrow into a "harbour-city": planning and providing for "dry harbours, warehouses, freight transport systems, control areas, fair parks, etc." (IMA, 1998: 8, 11). These are all grand proposals: they aim at

expanding most dimensions of the city's environment, at opening up its space: by promoting 'densification' and large scale city parks, by focusing on the entire littoral as a target area and calling for the creation of new urban centres - not shopping malls, or industrial parks, or hotel districts, but 'urban centres'. The spatial scale of the proposals, their inclination towards spaciousness, can be seen to have an underlying motive. I shall explore this motive soon but want first to draw attention to another of the plan's propositions.

Perhaps the most interesting of the proposals which the new plan introduces, for our concerns here, regards the administrative restructuring of the city's space through its partitioning into eight *unidades territoriales* (territorial units), a figure which contrasts sharply with the seventy-eight *unidades vecinales* (neighbourhood units) into which the city is currently divided. The idea behind the proposal is to provide a territorial framework under whose protectorate, so to speak, not only permanent (eg. neighbourhood committees) but also "flexible" community organizations can be instituted (no clear examples are given; only loosely the document refers to "grassroot economic organizations and sports organizations"). One cannot help read into the "flexibility" jargon with which the proposal is drafted an echo of the models of flexible accumulation into which contemporary capitalism has metamorphosed (see, for example, Borja and Castells, 1997; Castells, 1996b; Harvey, 1989). Indeed, the document itself at one point cautionary warns that the new legislation could be seen and interpreted to "divide grassroot organizations" by opening up a space of confrontation between community associations whose interests were once deployed over formerly distinctive catchment areas (IMA, 1998: 19).

All of the proposals contained in the plan seem therefore to focus on opening up the city's space, on clearing and cleaning the (built) environment (central parks, a new

arrangement for densely settled administrative districts) and designing a spacious new geography that would present no difficulty should one wish to move transversally across it (industrial corridors, freight transport systems, the littoral as a recreational avenue). For movement, and its capitalist equivalent, transport, has indeed been one of Antofagasta's old time planning burdens. After all, the city's elongated morphology (31km) does impose certain restrictions on urban transport systems: moving from one end of the city to the other can take up to two hours, an amount of time which is intolerable for both commuters and employers. With such a record it is hardly surprising to find out that the local authorities have commissioned, between 1997 and 1999, none other than four studies on the city's transport system (Testing, 1997; Senda, 1998; Suroeste, 1998; Gubbins, 1999c). For if the city is to compete in the world economy as financial and service centre to South America's most important harbour, it needs a geography through which capital can circulate freely - to ease commuters' movements to and from Mejillones, to facilitate the haulage of ship cargos and rapid access to the airport (which is located 20km north of the city), and transit along the future industrial corridor and between urban districts (it is easier to plan for eight than it is for seventy-eight). In sum, to come up with an economy of space that suits capital's needs and allows capital, in turn, to respond swiftly to political economic changes.

It seems, therefore, as if Antofagasta is at present being thought and conceived solely as an economic actor whose part is to be played within the overarching theatre of political economy. (Victor Gubbins, the consultant guru behind the Town Hall's future plans for development, once spoke of the need to think the urban in terms of "cities-as-firms" [*El Mercurio de Antofagasta*, 21 May 1999].) The city's space is therefore being regarded as devoid of any qualities or depth. It is a *tabula rasa*, an "abstract concept", as David Harvey put it, where Capital can unfold unrestrained and make spatial choices -

where to site a factory, upon which rural land will the city spread, which tracks to asphalt, where to site *Exponor*, a green area or the *Festival de las Colonias* - solely upon the basis of exchange (and surplus) value. The 'world-system' of political economy has produced a cartography of Antofagasta, one exempt from everyday sociality, and has made believe the local power holders that the outline and borders of the cartography can be shaped and patterned through the sole intervention of economic and political discourses. It can, of course, but not without affecting the way in which the practice of everyday life construes and constructs its own spatiality.

2.3 Culture and the Politics of Identity

The importance that the issue of the city's identity has acquired in the past few years can hardly be overstated. This has spread into all areas of social activity, from pamphleteering and advertising on the part of the local authorities, to community and other forms of grassroots mobilizations, cultural corporations, retailing, etc. The local chain of supermarkets Korlaet, for example, on seeing its hegemony threatened by the arrival of a nation-wide rival (emblematically called 'Leader', *Líder*), set in motion, drawing upon the resonance of the eight letter word, an unashamedly exclusivist advertising campaign designed to play on the then much debased, and yet ambiguous (for its inherent dependence on an 'Other'), notion of the 'self': *ser antofagastinos nos hace mejores*, **being** Antofagastinos makes us better (emphasis in the original). Anny Store, another chain of retail outlets, has a slogan which again plays with the themes of regionalism and identity: *Somos del Norte y para el Norte. Somos Regionalistas*, We are from the North and for the North, We are Regionalists. It seems fair to say, therefore, that the issue of cultural identity has permeated in very important ways the various levels

of social relationships at work in the city, from the institutional to the quotidian, and has become, in so doing, a particularly telling example of the concrete dynamic relations between cultural forms and political formations. It is my intention in this section to uncover some of the mechanisms through which those relations have been set in motion.

The *Plan de Desarrollo Comunal*, some of whose contents and propositions have already been discussed, seems as good a place as any other to present the much debated issue of the city's cultural identity. The document acknowledges the city's lack of identity right from its very beginning: commenting upon Antofagasta's external weaknesses (this is a SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats - analysis that the municipal consultants were carrying out) the text says: "Social unrootedness. High levels of transitoriness... The city is attractive from the point of view of labour and economics but it is no residential alternative (it offers poor standards of living). [...] The city has no international or national positive image." And later, when recounting the city's structural flaws: "Low levels of local identity... lack of urban symbols... decay of the historical built environment and general urban disharmony... Weakness of grassroot social organizations" (IMA, 1998: 5, 7).

The local authorities are, however, and as one would expect, far from alone in their diagnoses. The consultancy firm hired by the Town Hall to produce the city's future plan for urban renewal and redevelopment makes similar remarks in their final report: "It would seem that the reference to a 'slumbering Antofagasta' [an allusion to the 1960s song talked of in Chapter 1] imprinted the collective self and stigmatized it permanently [...] Antofagasta is characterised in general terms for the feeling of unbelonging of its population" (Gubbins, 1999b: 1).

That the issue of the city's (and region for that) lack of identity is something of which the local authorities are not only aware of but equally concerned with was proven during

the series of meetings and seminars that the regional government organised in 1990 to put up a new *Estrategia Regional de Desarrollo de la II Región* (Regional Strategy for the Development of the II Region). The seminar series concluded with the drafting of an eleven point programme which then came to be known as the *11 Proyectos para el Desarrollo* (11 Projects for Development) scheme. In 1993, however, it was pointed out that the programme lacked an identity project, that there was missing from it a cultural framework. A new meeting was then organized under the name of *Encuentro con nuestra Identidad* (Encounter with our Identity). Out of the occasion came a new document, an identity-building charter which was numbered and added to the now ‘Twelve Projects for Development’ programme. I shall stop for some time now to analyse the contents of the *Proyecto N°12* for I think it provides startling evidence of the extent to which the notion of ‘identity’, and the reified ontological category into which its colloquial usage often turns it, is a socially fabricated concept, one with as many nuances as social discourses take part in its elaboration.

Flicking through the pages of the document that embodies the ‘Twelfth Project’ (Gobierno Regional, 1994) one of the first things to attract one’s attention is the description of the amount of work that went into the organization of the 1993 meeting. To mention but a few instances of that work: the regional government, for instance, commissioned from the Instituto Profesional José Santos Ossa (IPJSO), later to be upgraded from professional institute to university, the elaboration of a working proposal, a copy of which would then be distributed to the various regional municipalities for their familiarisation with its contents; prior to the actual encounter, the Regional Secretary for Planning and Coordination set meetings with community organizations across the region to inform of and increase the awareness toward the project; during the encounter itself, 600 people participated in 19 workshops, each coordinated by a representative of the

regional government, presided by a Secretary (elected by the group), and monitored by an observer appointed by IPJSO. With so much going on, it is difficult not to see, in the various spin-off activities outgrowing from the main event, some residue of an overarching profit-driven motivation. In fact, the issue of the region's cultural identity has become a very lucrative area of concern for many parties throughout the 1990s. The *Corporación Pro Antofagasta*, ProA (Pro Antofagasta Corporation), for instance, a non governmental organization run by some of the city's most prominent empresarios (as it happens, the corporation shares its office premises with the Chilean Construction Chamber), has in the past funded the publication of books on the history of the city (see, for example, Panadés Vargas and González Pizarro, 1998; ProA, 1995) none of which, echoing the argument presented in Chapter 1, deals with post-1940 events. The local authorities themselves have taken up too the History-Identity couplet and re-edited a famous, and much cited amongst academics, 1930 book on the history of Antofagasta (Arce, 1997). From another perspective, much work has been done too on the subject of the region's identity by all three local universities (see, for example, IPJSO, 1991a, 1991b; Trabucco, 1993; Gómez Parra and Lehnert, 1993). Funding for that work has come from either the FONDECYT (a state programme for research in education, science and technology), the FNDR (National Fund for Regional Development) or the regional government itself. The private sector has also partaken of such research, following ProA's lead, by funding investigations similarly concerned with the identity theme, as has been the case with Minera Escondida, now a habitual benefactor of UJSO. By promoting and sponsoring the embracing of a historical identity, and the exercise of the retrospective outlook which goes along with it, one is left wondering whether the local power holders (the AIA and the Construction Chamber, with their grip on ProA; the regional government, through their research funds and administrative apparatus; the

Town Hall; the mining companies) have in fact not been in some measure distracting the community from the political economic forces which are decisively and dramatically realigning the city's social geography. In section 2.4 I shall attempt to show in some more detail how the veil of this distraction has been raised and how its 'distracting' or ideological function can be seen to work with other equally powerful symbolic narratives in warranting and legitimising the view of the city as an economic unit.

Resuming the analysis of the *Proyecto N°12*, what is outstanding is the ambivalence which with the identity-building project is alternatively conceived: at times a historicist enterprise ("To know and rescue the regional history... allows us to establish the necessary links of continuity and permanence between the past and the present", p. 19), at times a constructivist endeavour ("It is a matter of constructing the future. Entrepreneurs, neighbourhood leaders, the state, artists and intellectuals, women and community organizations, the media and opinion leaders: all partaking in the design of a profile for the Region's Identity. An efficient, integrative and possible profile", p. 21). There is, it seems, an underlying attempt at reconciling and integrating as many conceptions of the region as it is possible into an all-encompassing forward-looking project of modernity (another ambiguous concept of which more soon). This is best illustrated, I think, in the formidably ingenious association which the document makes between identity, labour and capital. I shall now quote at length from the document to show how this association is worked out and the terms in which it is sustained:

To train the local workforce, so that it can join the region's industry and mining, is a priority line of action, for the feeling of belonging to the region requires of a labour market strong enough to guarantee access to adequate standards of living. The high numbers of foreigners amongst the aforementioned economic sectors underscores that sense of unrootedness which hampers Regional Identity. For this reason, it is a fundamental responsibility of businessmen, in their roles as *constitutive actors of our region*, to engage, with great prominence, in our region's economic present and future (Gobierno Regional, 1994: 20; my emphasis).

That the region's identity passes through the prior recognition of its "mining destiny" is an idea which has since been pushed forth by different means (and, of course, which resonates with the AIA's Director's words of a vision for the city). It is most explicitly stated in the Regional Minister's preface to the project's document: "to invest in Identity is to invest in a future for the region... the Identity²⁰ has to be assumed as a regional resource upon which a competitive advantage must be developed" (Gobierno Regional, 1994: 6). But it can also be found in the media's coverage of every *Exponor* fair, in the repertoire of Minera Escondida's philanthropic activities, in the Town Hall's own *Plan de Desarrollo Comunal*, in the various ways through which the necessity of the *megapuerto* project is publicly expressed, etc. A remarkable, and telling for that, example of this symbiosis between history and the future, identity and the modern, is found in *Revista Megapuerto*, a magazine for 'executives' set up to promote the development of the harbour at Mejillones. The magazine is essentially a vehicle for advertising the region at large, celebrating and exalting its marks of progress and growth. It is, for that same reason, a privileged window to the industrialists' and businessmen vision of what modernity consists of and how the road towards it should be paved. What is outstanding about the magazine, however, is the fact that, despite its genre and vocation, it dedicates some of its contents to the question of the region's history and identity. The aforementioned association between identity and the modern reaches in these pages its sublime expression. In one of the magazine's earliest numbers we find an article about "The miner, pillar of our wealth" (*Revista Megapuerto*, Año I, Num. 2, 1997: 23). In it we can read: "Here [in Chile's northern provinces] the miner is all but

²⁰ This is one of such occasions in which the ambiguity and ambivalence with which the word 'identity' is employed comes to the surface: through the use of a capital letter the term is substantivated, reified into an ontological category, despite it being manifestly acknowledged that there is a need for collectively 'investing' in the process of its constitution, in its social construction.

one, he is an all-encompassing way of thinking and behaving. He is the totality of his children, wives, parents, of fellow miners that share a distinctive outlook on life [...] for there runs, in the blood of all of them, perhaps, a different substance. A dose of energy, of tenacity, of ferrous willingness, that transcends and identifies the northern miner.” The same issue contains articles on the “copper man”, a mummy found in Chuquicamata of a presumed pre-hispanic indigenous copper miner, and Antofagasta’s first industrial establishment, the silver melting plant of Huanchaca, founded in 1892.

For all its ingenuity, the association between identity, labour and capital that was set in motion and reinstated by the local power holders has been most fruitful in validating a particular reading and view of what regional history and modernity are all about. Cultural practices, in their wide anthropological sense, have not, of course, responded in too direct a fashion to the political economic forces behind the identity-labour-capital triad. Institutional cultural forms, on the other hand, have been reoriented in important ways towards the enhancement of certain symbolic expressions and discourses. It is my intention now to show how the discourses on what is meant to be modern and what is cultural in historical (identity) terms are constructed.

2.4 Modernity and History

The debate on what it is the meaning of ‘modernity’ in Latin America and in what terms the continent can embrace the concept has generated a vast amount of literature (see, for example, Brunner, 1988, 1994; Cuevas et. al., 1995; García Canclini, 1990;

Morandé, 1984; Larraín Ibáñez, 1996; Parker, 1990, 1993). It is most interesting that the discussion of the concept, as it is formulated in most of these texts, revolves at the same time around the idea of cultural identity, and how the latter acts as a fundamental structure, almost an essence that conditions and constrains the ways in which the project of modernity can be pursued. Here I am not directly concerned with such issues but shall rather focus my argument on the specific meanings conferred to both terms - 'modernity' and 'identity' - in Antofagasta, and the array of discourses through which such symbolic expressions are sustained. My analysis is therefore closer to Rabinow's account of the concept of modernity as its meaning was alternatively expanded, contracted and resignified in relation to the norms and forms of the social environment in nineteenth and early twentieth century France (Rabinow, 1989). It resembles also James Holston's ethnohistorical journey into the ideological forces behind that utopian experiment in 'modern' urbanism which became Brasília (Holston, 1989). The analysis, however, does relate to the literature on the subject in that, as it will be seen, both concepts (the 'modern' and 'identity') are ultimately reduced and essentialized into an opposite pair of signifiers whose meaningfulness requires the construction of a cultural continuum into which both terms can be reinserted and reconciled. In Antofagasta, such a continuum has been modelled on the images of growth and progress, and the mythology, in Barthes (1993) sense, of development and consumption.

It might have already become clear, from some of the arguments presented so far, that the terms 'culture', 'identity' and 'history', in Antofagasta, have undergone a flagrant conflation of significations, with all three words now seeming naturally interchangeable for one another. It is for that reason, for instance, that the *Festival de Chacabuco*, a biannual *pampa* revival celebration that takes place in the former nitrate refinery of Chacabuco, now declared National Heritage, publicizes itself as a 'cultural festival'. In

1999, the festival hosted the following activities: a function of *La Reina Isabel Cantaba Racheras*, a theatrical adaptation of the novel by Hernán Rivera Letelier (of whom I talked in Chapter 1); the exhibitions “A History of Saltpetre” and “Painting the Region”; the presentation of *La Cantata de Santa María de Iquique*, a short musical famous for its commemoration of the 1907 massacre; and performances by *murgas* (brass bands) from various former *oficinas*.

The Chacabuco festival, however, is but one in a series of ‘nitrate remembrance’ events that are sprinkled throughout any year’s calendar (see Plates II and III). All of them are charged with an ambience of nostalgia, agonizing gestures in their fight for memory. *Huellas de Identidad* (literally, Identity Traces), another such event, was thus advertised, in its 1999 convocation, as “Saltpetre Nostalgias. The North’s Greatest Open Museum”. The event took place in the Ruinas de Huanchaca, the monumental ruins of a silver melting plant that operated in Antofagasta between 1892 and 1902 (see Plate III). Today, the Ruinas occupy some one square kilometre of otherwise vacant land in the southern part of the city, less than two hundred metres away from the Universidad Católica del Norte (in fact, the university owns the land upon which the ruins lie). The imposing and grossly beautiful stone construction has been declared National and Historical Heritage but stands in what could otherwise be adequately referred to as a condition of neglect. (It is worth pausing in the description of the Ruinas for they shall figure prominently in later analyses.) The “saltpetre nostalgia” took over the grounds of the ruins and put up a colourful display of photographs and memorabilia (old radios, gramophones, *fichas* (the tokens or chits in which nitrate workers received their payments), posters) and a stage where an ongoing show included musical performances by *murgas* and Andean folkloric bands, and dancing interventions by *caporales* and *diabladas* (popular religious dance groups). People turned up dressed in 1920s costumes

and there was a small barbecue stand set up by the organization selling typical Chilean food, *empanadas* and *anticuchos*. And from the heights of a strategically situated pole waved freely the blue, white and red colours of the Chilean flag.

In 1999, the celebration of Identity Traces coincided with a ‘classical’ of nitrate commemoration events: the 22nd anniversary of the movement of the plaza of the former nitrate refinery of *José Francisco Vergara* to its actual location at the Universidad de Antofagasta. In 1977, Soquimich, the state’s nitrate mining company and owner of the former *oficina*, donated the plaza, a national monument since 1981²¹, to the university, which has since held an annual reunion event for the delight of all *pampinos*. There is little in the happening that might distinguish it from the Identity Traces or indeed any other nitrate festival. Again one finds singing and dancing to the brass music of the *murgas* and the *filarmónicas* (philharmonics), people dressed up in period clothes, traditional Chilean cuisine, etc. Families come in full, from the grandparents to the newborn, stashed with an eagerness for *compartir* (to share - but the verb is often used without specifying what is it that one wants to share, thus enhancing one’s willingness to spend time with people, with friends), of sharing memories and histories, of bringing the past back to life.

These are surely all cultural expressions of a definite kind. Acknowledging so, *El Mercurio de Antofagasta*, reporting on both the Ruinas and the university events, headlines the day-after front page with a self-explanatory “A Day with History” (29 November 1999). Inside, we find an article titled “*Pampa abierta en Ruinas de Huanchaca*” (Open pampa in the Ruinas of Huanchaca; the words “open pampa” are, of

²¹ Although, unfortunately, I cannot afford to develop the point other than by mentioning it in passing, it is worth noting how the designation of a place as National Heritage actually works to sanction History. The choice of locations for the *pampa* cultural revivals are, thus, far from arbitrary decisions. There is, as I shall argue later, plenty of Space in History.

course, an allusion to Andrés Sabella's *Norte Grande*, for those are the opening words of his book). In it we can read: "The idea [behind the celebrations] was to bring back to life a foregone, albeit real enough in our collective memory, age... These pictures [the ones shown in the reportage] show the real power of the *pampa*'s remembrance. That which resists even if they dismantle *oficinas* and deny its history in official records."

I have cited the remarks made by *El Mercurio de Antofagasta* because the paper is probably the most outstanding of the crucibles in which the fusion and blending of the modernist and identity discourses is taking place. There are, of course, other mediums and instances through which to broadcast and present the city's future development as a modernity-with-identity project. The headquarters of the Railway Company (*Ferrocarril de Antofagasta a Bolivia* - FCAB), for instance, are sited in what today is called the *barrio histórico* (old city) and is none other than the city's founding quarter. The buildings themselves are the original, if refurbished, premises of the *Compañía de Salitre y Ferrocarril de Antofagasta* (Antofagasta Nitrate the Railway Company). Today, the building's neo-colonial architecture stands as a suitable metaphor of the power that the company holds: an unparalleled icon of the region's history, its symbolism belies the eye, for if there is a temporal plane with which the company is committed that is unequivocally the future - a major actor in the regional economy, the Railway Company is deeply involved with the political and economic machinations that surround the *megapuerto* project (one of the reasons being that the company's migration to Mejillones would allow them to sell to the Town Hall the inner city estate of their property which was the founding landmark, literally, of Antofagasta's great spatial and thus social divide).

Back to *El Mercurio*, it is fascinating to see how the meaning of the notion of 'modernity' is almost as a rule constructed over specific city developments in particular

and urban programmes in general. The announcement of a central government national urban strategy for four selected cities, one of them being Antofagasta, makes it to the front page headlines as “The Future of a Modern City” (26 May 2000); the news of the Town Hall’s projects for urban redevelopment also make it as front page headlines: “Urban Revolution - Great Transformation of Antofagasta: Set in Motion an Innovative Project of Modernization” (21 May 1999); and again a front page headline, this time over a much waited for improvement in infrastructure: “Modern Movie House - A Theatre with Six Screens will be Installed in Antofagasta - the Dream of Thousands of Citizens Comes True” (26 November 1999). One more headline: this time the word ‘modern’ is not used albeit its meaning is clearly invoked by the phrasing of the sentence: “ ‘Plan Antofagasta’ [an allusion to the Town Hall’s projects for urban development and renewal] - We Will Have Chile’s Best Beach Resort: Artificial Beaches Transform the City” (3 October 1999). But what is modernity if not the paroxysm of consumption?: “McDonalds Arrives to Antofagasta - They will Modernize the Torpederas District with a \$1.3 million Investment” (25 May 2000). This latest of developments, the McDonaldization of Antofagasta, has even been publicly endorsed by the city’s mayor in a recent internet contribution (Araya, 10 June 2000).

Indeed, the theme of consumption has become a major issue in Chilean society since the days of the military dictatorship, when the country embarked in an openly neo-liberal political and economic project: the country’s social security system was privatized, public resources to health and education shrank (which explains the reasons for the early 1990s boom in private universities) and access to consumer credit was widely promoted. Marco Antonio de la Parra, one of Chile’s most acclaimed contemporary writers and dramatists, has written of those dictatorship days: “I plunged into my family, I submerged into my marriage, I accepted that commendatory re-evaluation of the private

world where we all hid during those first years. I understood what many did: transvestite into pragmatics, impassioned with that sole spiritual rest that the dictatorship was to supply us with: consumerism” (De la Parra, 1997: 46).

Consumerism and Modernity became synonyms, the two faces of the same coin. And indeed the image of the coin provides a suitable metaphor itself for that social and cultural force which was producing ‘modern consumers’ in the first place: capitalism and economic development. There is much more to consumerism than its mere conceptualization as an instrumental offspring of capitalist manoeuvres, however. Janet Finn, writing on women’s crafting of the everyday in Chuquicamata, has in fact argued that consumerism can become a site for the enactment of political strategies, a central tenet of the practical politics of daily life (Finn, 1998). I shall take up and elaborate further upon this point in later chapters. Here I just wanted to endorse Finn’s view that capitalist policies to promote consumerism often metamorphose into spaces of and for political reclamation and, therefore, that consumption habits cannot simply be recorded, as is often the case in the Chilean scene, as a repertoire of submissive practices.²²

Having said so, in Antofagasta there is a string of very powerful economic discourses which present their case for consumerism through its strong association to modernity and development. A year after the national chain of supermarkets *Líder* arrived to the city, *El Mercurio* published a small weekend supplement dedicated to the store (27 November 1999). In it we can read passages such as the following: “*Líder* is endorsing the region’s development and has, in this vein, announced further investments to improve its

²² I am mentioning here Janet Finn’s work on ‘positive’ consumption for it too refers to the Chilean scene (and the Antofagasta region in particular). For a recent and general review of the latest trends of academic reflection on consumption see Miller, ed. 1995 and Miller et. al. 1998. For a review of the literature on the anthropology of consumption see Miller, 1995. On the subject of the practice of consumption as a form of resistance see de Certeau, 1984.

infrastructure and thus add extra value for its clients... they are expanding the retailing area of the megamarket with a modern infrastructure that will help consolidate the ‘mall’ *concept* for the establishment” (my emphasis). ‘The hostess with the mostest’²³, the ‘mall’, no longer a place or a venue but a concept. This abusive use of rhetoric on the part of the newspaper should not distract us, however, from the fact that, in Antofagasta, the aesthetics and language of modernity are being produced and symbolised by the landscape of consumption²⁴. It is with this in mind that Eugenio Tironi, writing on the sociological changes undergone by Chile in the past decade, says: “If we were to put it in a few words, the decade of the 90s has been the decade of the outburst of the masses. In lakes and malls, in restaurants and beaches, in airports and cinemas, there we find the multitudes spreading over all possible spaces... [in] the form of consumers” (Tironi, 1999: 16). And along the same lines, Tomás Moulian remarks on how “everyday culture in contemporary Chile is penetrated by the symbolism of consumption” and the description of the mall as “the pathos of consumption” (Moulian, 1997: 106, 114). It is also in that vein that the Committee for the Renewal of Antofagasta’s Urban Core, whose membership consists of members of the Regional Government, the Regional Minister for Planning and Coordination, the Regional Minister for Public Works, the Regional Minister for Housing and Urbanism and Antofagasta’s Town Hall, made a specific recommendation in its final report to “enhance the role of the Old City as an Open Mall” (Comisión de Renovación, 1999: 8).

This association, however, of modernity to consumption, progress and development, does not only take place at the level of sweeping generalizations, on the part of

²³ I have borrowed the phrase from a song of the same title by American singer songwriter Frank Black (1994). The song is about American ‘mall culture’.

²⁴ For an analysis of how we construct much of our everyday experience of being in the modern Western world through the landscape of consumption see Sack, 1988.

sociologists, or powerful ideological discourses, on the part of capitalist agents. Everyday talk is imbued too of the same idioms. When asked, for instance, where in Chile would they rather live (it is almost taken for granted that most people do not like living in Antofagasta), most of my informants and friends came up with the same answers: Iquique, La Serena or Valparaíso/Viña del Mar. These are Chile's most important tourist resorts, buoyant and fervent cities where one can always find things to do - unlike Antofagasta, the average script reads, which is *fome*, boring, still, almost predictable. The city has a long history of rivalry with fellow regional capital Iquique, located some 600km north from Antofagasta and seat to the Tarapacá regional government. Iquique has been a favourite city for successive national governments when it came to draw regional policies. The city boasts a casino and the *Zofri* (*Zona Franca de Iquique*), a free trade area that has become an emblem for the city and a paradise of consumption for all northerners. It is not uncommon for people living in Antofagasta to leave early in the morning for Iquique in order to buy at the *Zofri* (that is, consumer durables that will render worthwhile a 12 hour return trip) and make their way back in the evening. People talk wonders about Iquique: about its many restaurants and cafes, the variety and size of its nightclubs (Antofagasta's *Happy* discotheque - the city's biggest -, I was once told burlesquely, would hardly make it as a toilet for the *Faro*, Iquique's night jewel), its beautiful coastal promenade and the architecture of the old city, etc. With such a record of credentials, there is plenty, of course, for the Iquiqueños to feel proud about. They, unlike us, most Antofagastinos can be heard to say if probed, have identity; they have a mayor - Jorge Soria, popular at national scale for being an unstoppable source of inventiveness and initiative - that does things for the city. In sum, a collective script which renders understandable why an Iquique friend of mine would brag about his city by saying that *Dios es iquiqueño*, God is Iquiqueño (born in Iquique).

The discourse of enviousness towards Iquique or La Serena or Viña is deceiving, however. Antofagasta has the second highest income per capita in the country, next only to Santiago. Moreover, in October 1999, the national newspaper *La Tercera* published a report in which it placed Antofagasta third on the list of the country's cities with the highest standards of living (albeit first, it has to be said, came Iquique). The city's quietness can, at times, certainly be despairing, particularly for the youth, but it can also be a blessing, as I was told on many occasions by groups of middle class parents. During my second stay in the city, in 1999, I had the chance to talk widely with a PhD English student in economics from the University of Cambridge, who was then doing her fieldwork in Antofagasta on the subject of the terms of contract between suppliers to the mining industry and the big mining corporations. She got married, during the time of her fieldwork, to an English engineer working at Minera Escondida, and often commented that, despite not being entirely at ease in the city, mainly for cultural and racial reasons - both she and her fiancé were black -, she thought of the city as a wonderful place to bring up a family - peaceful and with a friendly environment.

One can see, therefore, that there are double standards when appraising the city. The young, for instance, are inclined to look outwards for excitement: to Santiago, or Viña or Iquique. For them, those are 'modern' cities. To be modern is to be on the edge of contemporaneity, to 'ride the wave', as I was once or twice told. Many university students, for example, look to Santiago, or even Spain, to further their education with postgraduate courses. They need to get out, *salir fuera*, of the region, and sometimes the country for which the former stands, to keep up to date, to seize the opportunities which are open to them 'out there'. And this regardless of the fact that many, that is Chileans from other provinces or even neighbouring South Americans, are desperate to 'make it in', for Antofagasta has probably the most buoyant of the region's labour markets.

Modernity, for all these people, has an association with professional training and career development, with economic growth and prosperity, with access to credit and consumption.

Yet modernity is also construed around ideas of security and safety, a peaceful and friendly environment. This is the notion of modernity that many middle class families sustain. It is worth pointing out that in-built into any of those ideas - security, safety, etc. - there are, of course, many other presuppositions and beliefs as to what modern urban life should really amount to. The landscape of consumption, for instance, of which the mall is perhaps its most conspicuous example, is *per se* a friendly landscape. The *Líder* megamarket shrewdly presents itself as a family environment - not as a shopping centre but as a 'mall' (despite it being, both in size and infrastructure, little more than a supermarket; the place, after all, consists of a very spacious supermarket, a home depot centre and three take away fast food restaurants). And this has indeed proven to be an efficacious strategy, for unlike an ordinary supermarket, where there is not much point in being there other than to do one's shopping, *Líder* has succeeded in attracting people who will now go there to hang around and spend the evening. Another example can be found in the set of children's games that was installed in the course of 1998 in the central esplanade of Avenida de Brasil, a clear and elegant palm tree boulevard and the city's only office and high class residential avenue. The decision to install the games there, by all accounts an unduly unjust one, for only a privileged minority group actually resides along the avenue's flanks, was an obvious attempt at sculpting a built environment which was patently extraneous to the rest of the city. This is an almost encapsulated area, one at odds with its surrounding environment. Nevertheless, with its air of tranquility and kindly illuminated spaces, the avenue and its games, if once perhaps indeed intended for the sole enjoyment of its immediate vicinity, has today become a favourite place for

the weekend evening strolls of families of all origins. We see therefore the elements out of which this version of modernity is constructed to be producing and reproducing what we could aptly call the ideology of the family. In this account a modern city is therefore a city that works towards raising the standards of living of the family.

It is against the background provided by the notions of modernity already mentioned that the idea of a Regional Identity is constructed. The modernity-as-a-project version, the one embraced by the youth and the people who look outside the region for inspiration, is supported and complemented by the constructionist identity charter. Regional identity, it will be recalled, is in this account meant to stand as a process of coming-into-being, a community building programme. Identity can therefore be interpreted to stand for 'the modernity that we shall be', 'the modernism that we shall embrace'. Visions of economic growth (the *megapuerto*, the urban development and renewal proposals) and prosperity are here assembled into an identity project, a programme that will entice people to construct and "move towards the region that we want", as the slogan for the *Proyecto N° 12* reads (Gobierno Regional, 1994).

Then there is the other interpretation of identity, the historicist outlook. This version consists in a reappropriation of the region's mining past, in infusing life back into and illuminating the *pampa's* history of community struggle and prowess. This is what the *pampa* revival festivals are all about, what the reappraisal of the mining community - 'the miner, pillar of our wealth' - and its ethos is trying to underscore and bring forth. These gestures and activities, we have seen, have generally been put together and broadcast for use and consumption by the family. They take place at weekends and put up a series of spectacles that cater to people of all ages. They are open events, with an open space-time structure: bands play at their will, with no fixed timetable for their interventions; people dance to one song only to resume their seat and talk with an old

friend for well over an hour; one moves freely from one type of activity to another, eating, drinking, resting, strolling around the numerous stalls; children hang around carefree, making new friends and enjoying the closest thing to a day 'out', in a city surrounded by a landscape where to be 'out' can only mean to be 'nowhere'. People move about these open spaces, be it the Ruinas, Chacabuco or the plaza of the *oficina Vergara*, and in so doing they are writing the cultural text of a narrative that is helping to establish a new recursive link between the present and the past, the modern and the historical. Tomorrow, the spaces will be gone, retrieved into their condition of nowhere-ness. But the narrative of identity will remain, speaking on behalf of History to the present.

These are not mutually exclusive discourses, however - that is, the interplay between modernity and progress, on the one hand, and modernity and history, on the other. The triadic chain identity-labour-capital draws heavily on both discourses whilst at the same time helping to constitute them. The chain unifies the discourses by bringing them together under the all-encompassing definition of modernity which itself has tuned and rendered meaningful. The symbol of the miner (labour), for instance, has become a repository for both family values *and* projects of further capitalist expansion, such as the *megapuerto* complex at Mejillones. As such it can be seen to mediate and reconcile the contradictions inherent to the parallel production of the discourses. For the circulation and social life of the discourses are laden with tensions of all kinds. The enlargement of the pit mine at Chuquicamata, for instance, will soon reach the town, which is therefore already in the process of being relocated to neighbouring Calama. Codelco, the state company owner of the mining operations, has promised to leave a testimony of some sort that will speak of the encampment that once stood there. There is talk, for example, of erecting a museum of mining in Calama. Capitalism and progress, in this view, take

place at the expense of history, indeed one could almost say that they erase history, at least from a spatial point of view. Which is why modernity is therefore resignified as the reassertion of identity - via the construction of a museum.

An enquiry, such as the one conducted here, into the processes through which the discourses on modernity, identity and economic development gain meaning is important because insofar as they help uncover the social dynamics at work in the city they allow us to grasp who are the urban actors - families, students, young professionals, economic and political agents - taking part in Antofagasta's social and cultural change. Modernity, identity and growth are the idioms through which social change is being effected, negotiated and contested in the city. They are presented, for the most part, as narratives of change and movement, of historical content and temporal structure. The story they tell is a story of time: times past and times awaiting. Yet such a reading is misleading if taken at face value. For each discourse is played out and acted at a specific place (Mejillones, Ruinas de Huanchaca, Chacabuco, *Plaza Vergara*, *Exponor*, old city, etc.). There is therefore a hidden spatial dimension to each discourse, that is to say, to each and one of the actors' engagement with and production of the discourse. The rest of this thesis, except one theoretical chapter on the contributions to the thinking of space, is dedicated to unwrapping the fabric of social relationships through which space is built into the discourses and therefore to understanding the different ways through which social relationships in Antofagasta decide to become spatial.

2.6 Conclusion

It has been my intention in this chapter to draw an outline of the structural forms and cultural formations that make up the social system of present day Antofagasta. My aim

was none other than to introduce the reader to the current political, economic and social circumstances that are conditioning and shaping the experience of living in the city today.

From a purely demographic point of view, Antofagasta's social structure is not too different from that of the country at large. The moment we incorporate history and change to the stasis of demography, however, we get a very different picture. We find the city to be to a great extent defined by its mining legacy and its mining present. The city's mining trajectory, both future and past, has penetrated profoundly into the foundations of the social structure. The traditionally gendered nature of the mining work, for instance, has meant that women have become the city's most important agents of spatialization. In the absence of men, they are the ones that take responsibility for all commitments that require one to move about the city. More importantly, their appropriation of urban space is often done with a view to producing a benevolent space for their children. The city that women use, the streets that they walk, the buses they take, the routes they follow, the times they decide to undertake any of the previous - those are all spatial choices that are generally made thinking of the children that accompany them.

Students play also a very important part in the dynamics of the social structure. They have great spatial knowledge of the city, which is built on the many times they have had to move up and down its long, circuitous morphology, whether as part of their professional training or by way of exploring and (re)creating a city that offers few recreational alternatives.

The very important role that Antofagasta plays for the Chilean economy, which can be summarily indicated by reference to its 31.3 per cent contribution to national export revenues, has huge implications for the city's social structure. These might *appear* to be

superstructural for the most part, that is of a political and economic kind. Indeed, a lot of what is done by the local power holders - the industrialists' association, the regional government, the Town Hall - is effected and deployed at such levels, and therefore does not appear to affect, or at any rate engage with, the grass roots and everyday sociality. But this is misleading. The economic script, the vision of the city that the power holders sustain and endorse, requires, for its effective deployment, to penetrate the social structure in its entirety. There is, therefore, the need to obtain people's support for the venture. And this is done through the production of a cultural discourse, an ideological text that assembles all realms of social life into a homogeneous social arrangement and renders as commonsensical and natural what is otherwise fragmented. In Antofagasta this has been done by rendering coterminous the following string of concepts: history, identity, labour, consumerism, economic development and modernity.

This is not to say, however, that the dominant ideology of which the string of concepts are part has become a powerful cement that integrates the whole of Antofagasta's society. On the contrary, the discourses are disputed and contested on many fronts. Abner Cohen has argued that "in the advanced industrialised democratic societies the major part of the political system is... hidden" and therefore labels the politics of the hidden as "masquerade politics" (Cohen, 1993: ix). He develops his argument on the basis of an analysis of the politico-cultural structure of the Notting Hill London Carnival. Borrowing the term from Miliband's study on *Marxism and Politics*, Cohen defines Carnival as a 'contested territory' where the dominant ideology and the ideologies of resistance and opposition meet. "Carnival is thus politics masquerading behind cultural forms" (Cohen, 1993: 132).

Following Cohen, I wish to put forward the view that the ideology of the ruling classes in Antofagasta is being contested and challenged not solely by way of 'textual'

productions, that is political discourses sustained in time (the so called ‘weapons of the weak’: foot dragging, pilfering, dissimulation, feigned ignorance; marches, protests, riots, revolts), but also through what have been called “geographies of resistance” (Pile and Keith, 1997). The *pampa* culture revival festivals, the *Exponor*, the *Líder* megamarket, the proposed redevelopment of the Old City and the urban shore, the Avenida del Brasil; these are all *places* that have been produced and invested with the qualities of the dominant ideology. As *spaces*, however, they sustain no ideology other than that of their ephemeral consumption. They are occupied, reappropriated, reinvented, used and abandoned. Resistance and opposition take place through the everyday production of space. The spaces produced are mercurial and elusive, they have a liquid structure and almost no temporal continuity. And it is for that reason that they are political, oppositional and reclamatory. And it is for that reason that the city, in the words of the much perplexed local authorities, is seen to be characterised by “social unrootedness”, “high levels of transitoriness” and a “general feeling of unbelonging”. For space in Antofagasta is not a-given but a-becoming. This I shall attempt to document and illustrate in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORIES OF SPACE

Space has proliferated in the social sciences, exploding into contemporary theory in expanding fragmentary positions.
(Moore, 1986 (1996): viii)

Quietly and undeclared as such, a loose assemblage of thinking has entered social science and the humanities.[...] It is the language and study of positions, stances, moves, panoptic views and close or distant gazes, in short, of spatial orientation and separation, and their effect and control in human society, and on theories about society.
(Parkin, 1991: 1)

As the epigraphs to this chapter suggest, space has become a major subject of academic debate in recent times. In this chapter, I aim at charting the intellectual genealogy of such a line of thought. The epigraphs have been chosen for their affiliation to anthropological theory and, indeed, Henrietta Moore's monograph on the Marakwet of Kenya was one of the earliest and remains one of the most sophisticated studies of the role and insights that the systematic analysis of space can yield. Having said so, anthropology has for the most part lagged behind in the comprehension and advancement of the new spatial perspective. In this respect, the most important contributions have come from the hand of geographers, feminists and postcolonial theorists. My own thoughts on the subject are therefore substantially derived from and supported by the insights provided by such literature. There is much to be learned from these studies and there is, also, much that anthropology can contribute to further the development of what is already in stock. In this chapter I am therefore concerned with

clearing the ground for such an anthropological contribution. The ethnographic chapters that follow the present exercise in theoretical assessment are a first step in that direction.

The history of the idea of space can be summarily pictured as an intellectual voyage towards its ‘temporalization’, its understanding as ‘movement’ (what Foucault termed its “desanctification” [1986: 23]), away from its conception as “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” (Foucault, 1980: 70). This gradual shift in the way that space has been thought, a shift whose ultimate implications are ontological and epistemological (Soja, 1996, 1999; Massey, 1999), can be neatly apprehended as a move from thinking of things in space, to thinking about space, to thinking *spatially*. There are echoes of such a developmental classification all over the literature. At the simplest level, one could speak of a move from thinking of space as an absolute category, to its conception as a relation and its current formulation as a performative construct. Henri Lefebvre, for example, spoke of spatial practices, representations of space and lived spaces (1991). Edward Soja, building upon Lefebvre’s original insights, reformulated these as Firstspace (perceived space), Secondspace (conceived space) and Thirdspace (lived space) (1996, 1999). Closer to home, in anthropology, David Parkin has dubbed these the centrist, relational and amorphist views of space (Parkin, 1991: 7). My own view of space lies closer to the performative or practical end of the classificatory scheme. In fact, even more than a practical category, I see space, and thus prefer to speak of it, as a *capacity*.²⁵ It is towards the spelling out of such an idea that I deem convenient to deconstruct the history of the spaces that preceded it. This I shall do next.

²⁵ That is, both as potency and as spaciousness.

3.1 A (Very) Brief History of Space²⁶

In classical or presocratic philosophy, the problem of space used to be discussed as a corollary to the opposition full/empty. The opposition is analogous to that which exists between the concepts of 'being' and 'nothingness', and which thus rendered the subject of space as propitious to metaphysical and ontological disquisitions (Ferrater Mora, 1994: 1079-1089). Parmenides, for instance, argued that it was nonsensical to talk about space as emptiness: empty space would be nothing at all, and it seemed a contradiction to talk of nothingness as if it had ontological properties. Democritus, on the other hand, clearly distinguished between the atoms and the void which separated them - how could one otherwise talk about movement? This said, atomist philosophy merely managed to supplant one question with another, for if atoms were to be distinguished from the void that separated them, how, in turn, was the nature of the void to be defined? These questions poised a new problem, that of the finity or infinity of space. It is Lucretius that argues the case for the infinity of space (echoing an argumentation by Archytas, the Pythagorean, who wondered whether it would be possible at the end of the world to stretch out one's hand or not); and it is Gorgias that proves that space cannot be infinite for, to exist, the infinite would be nowhere; for if it were anywhere it would be encompassed by something, ceasing therefore to be infinite. Gorgias' case introduced too the first clear idea of space and matter as belonging to different categories (Jammer, 1969).

²⁶ I am here concerned with presenting a brief history of the philosophical doctrines that have attempted to explain the nature of space. I shall therefore not deal directly with the views on space that have come from the fields of geometry and physics, or shall only do so when developments in the latter fields have affected the arguments of philosophy.

Plato acknowledges the distinction drawn by Gorgias between space and matter but then goes on to assert their coincidence. “Plato explains that space is the matter of which material objects... are composed [...] The idea is that space is like a block of clay into which the shapes of the elements are “impressed” [...] In this case, when we talk of an object being “in space,” what we mean is that shapes of the elements that make up the object are impressed on space/matter” (Huggett, 1999: 5). This view of space is rehearsed by Aristotle in his writings. Aristotle does not theorize about space but about *topos*, place, for the notion of an empty space is incompatible with his physics. Rather than a theory on space what Aristotle therefore advances is a theory of place or a theory of positions in space. For Aristotle, the place of an object is “the boundary of the containing body at which it is in contact with the contained body” (in Huggett, 1999: 76). Body and place (matter and space) are seen here to be, again, coincidental. What is of real interest in Aristotle’s conception of space, however, is his contention that all the elemental substances have a natural tendency to move towards their own special places; that is, any object not in its appropriate place will, as a principle of nature, move toward it. This means that because places are parts of space (space being the sum total of all places), space is the cause of natural motions. Space, for Aristotle, was a “dynamical field structure”; that is, in conceptualizing space, Aristotle developed a theory of mechanics - a very modern idea by all accounts, as we shall see later (Jammer, 1969: 19; Huggett, 1999).

Much of what was written after Aristotle did, in fact, little more than replicate and reformulate the commentaries of the early Greek philosophers. The idea of space as a container or receptacle (that is, a place that allows for movements within), which prefigures that of space as an absolute category, is already present, for example, in the writings of Plato. It was later most famously maintained by Descartes and Newton. In

this tradition space is thought to be an entity, not very dissimilar from the physical objects that may occupy it; it is something relative to which the objects may move. Thus Newton's famous definition of space reads: "Absolute Space, in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable" (in Huggett, 1999: 118). What is of interest in Newton's conception of space is that it is a necessary prerequisite for the validity of the first law of motion: "If all motions are motions relative to some material reference frame or other, then there can be no absolute sense of constant motion or acceleration, and thus the all-important law of inertia is unintelligible. If, however, one postulates the existence of an underlying absolute space, then absolute acceleration is acceleration relative to space itself" (Huggett, 1999: 263). This is important because it keeps referring the idea of space back to the idea of movement, a formulation already present in the writings of, for example, Democritus and Aristotle.

The idea of space as a relational category, on the other hand, is already latent in the thought of Theophrastus, who saw space as defined by way of the order and position of bodies. The relational view was later, and most famously, articulated by Leibniz, who argued that space is a system of relations in which indivisible substances, or "monads", stand to one another (Smart, 1967). Leibniz's view of space as a system of relations is therefore void of metaphysical or ontological implications. In postulating the importance of relations and sacrificing the notion of an absolute frame of reference, Leibniz was effectively underscoring the significance of the idea of motion for our understanding of space.

The most important of the theories of space that were to follow the relational vs. absolutist positions held by Leibniz and Newton, and one which was to inform our folk models and ideas to the present day (particularly so in social theory), was that of Kant. For Kant, space is a form of our sensory intuition, that is, an *a priori* form of our

sensibility. Space is a necessary and *a priori* representation, one that serves as a foundation for all external intuitions. In sum, Kantian space is the condition for the possibility of all phenomena. The problem of space ceased to be a problem of physics and became instead an inherently philosophical one. Kant's views on space, although not strictly subjectivist or idealistic (as were Fichte's and Hegel's later views on the subject; Kant's space is more properly described as 'transcendental'), have great import because they established the idea of space as a condition for universal experience; space became a pre-condition of cognition. To know things was to know them *spatially*. Space, therefore, became something *given*, intrinsic to our understanding of the world. In other words - and this is a shift that was to prove crucial for the future development of a social theory of space -, the problem of space became an epistemological issue as much as an ontological one.

The space that Kant assumed to frame our experience of the world was Euclidean, defined by straight and parallel lines, and right angles. In this he was merely following the convention of his day. Unfortunately for Kant, the discovery of non-Euclidean geometry, brought under a general theory of geometrical space by Riemann in 1854, led to the functional demise of any notion of absolute space, Kantian or otherwise. Such development was crucial because it proved that there could be many spaces, all with logical and consistent geometries of their own. This led Poincaré to argue that any measurement of space is valid as long as it is stipulated by "convention"; that is, a kind of agreement between scientists about which to accept (Huggett, 1999). In this vein, Max Jammer, commenting on the geometries that are open to scientists in their choice of convention, has written: "Hence it is clear that the structure of the space of the physics is not, in the last analysis, anything given in nature or independent of human thought. It is a function of our conceptual scheme" (Jammer, 1969: 173).

I shall draw to a conclusion this very brief and selective review of the history of space here. There are two final comments I would like to add, though. The first is that modern physics has ‘opened’ the traditional three-dimensional structure of space (up-down, left-right, forth-back) to a fourth dimension, namely, time. (The idea of opening space to time was Hermann Minkowski’s, a teacher of Einstein.) In the words of Albert Einstein: “With the discovery of the relativity of simultaneity, space and time were merged in a single continuum in a way similar to that in which the three dimensions of space had previously been merged into a single continuum [...] The four-dimensional space of the special theory of relativity is just as rigid and absolute as Newton’s space” (in Huggett, 1999: 257). Needless to say that with the discard of the notions of absolute space and absolute time in favour of a combined space-time frame of reference there was a concomitant change in the metaphysical foundations of physics (Trusted, 1994; Zubiri, 1997).

My second point has to do with this ‘opening’ of physical space to time. This welding together of space and time was a requirement of the special theory of relativity developed by Einstein. The theory of relativity postulated a necessary connection between momentum and energy, between inert mass and energy. “In essence, the theory is an equation for the metric of space-time, in terms of the distribution of matter. In other words, the metric, and hence the geometry of space-time, depends on the way in which matter is distributed. Since space-time determines which motions are inertial, in general relativity we reach a situation in which there is symmetry in the actions and reactions of space and matter” (Huggett, 1999: 265). That is, space (space-time, really) is a potency or force through which changes (actions and reactions) are brought about. Said somewhat differently: space and motion (read: movement, that is, time) are intrinsically related. An idea that has been conspicuously (and incredibly, given its long tradition in

philosophy) absent from, and neglected in, the accounts and treatment to which the subject has been rendered in the social sciences.

3.2 Social Space

In this section I intend to introduce the reader to the corpus of theories that have been produced towards the conceptualization of space in social theory, with particular reference to anthropology. My presentation is in no way exhaustive, this being for two reasons. On the one hand, I am interested in the way that society has been analysed as a spatial entity; that is, I am here concerned with presenting the various ways through which the relevance of space for social theory has been understood. I am not interested in the various notions and ideas about space that different societies may have. This I believe to be a project for cognitive anthropology and, indeed, one in which there have recently been substantive and important advances (see, for example, Barnes, 1993; Wassmann, 1998). I am interested, though, in the anthropological literature on cultural representations of landscape (see Hirsch and O'Hanlon, 1995). This is because I believe that no matter how people think of space, the ways in which they represent their landscape will inform their actions and, therefore, their modes of 'coping' with their environment. I take this notion of 'coping' to be an important idea in my argumentation because it highlights the inherently practical (that is, instrumental, first, and transformational, second) dimension of social actions. Having said so, I am fully aware that the line separating space cognition from cultural representations of landscape is a tenuous one, if existent at all.

On the other hand, the idea that there is a spatial dimension to the way that social relationships are played out is a relatively recent one and, therefore, one with a rather

short intellectual history. Space, in social theory, has traditionally been thought of as the realm where social things happen; that is, as a geographical or territorial construct. Only recently has space been recast as a dimension intrinsic to, rather than encompassing, social relationships.

This said, I shall now turn to Durkheim. I shall use his ideas on space to preview the ways in which anthropology has dealt with the subject. Thereafter I shall go on to summarize what the disciplines of geography and sociology have recently said about the concept of space.

Durkheim and the Anthropology of Space

The most straightforward expression of Durkheim's view on space can be found in the introductory chapter of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915: 9-11):

At the roots of all our judgments there are a certain number of essential ideas which dominate all our intellectual life; they are what philosophers since Aristotle have called the categories of the understanding: ideas of time, space, class, number, cause, substance, personality, etc. They correspond to the most universal properties of things. They are like the solid frame which encloses all thought... Now when primitive religious beliefs are systematically analysed, the principal categories are naturally found. They are born in religion and of religion; they are a product of religious thought... Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities... So if the categories are of religious origin, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts; they too should be social affairs and the product of collective thought... It is the same thing with space... space is not the vague and indetermined medium which Kant imagined; if purely and absolutely homogeneous, it would be of no use, and could not be grasped by the mind. Spatial representation consists essentially in a primary co-ordination of the data of sensuous experience. But this co-ordination would be impossible if the parts of space were qualitatively equivalent and if they were really interchangeable... That is to say that space could not be what it is if it were not... divided and differentiated. But whence come these divisions which are so essential?... All these distinctions evidently come from the fact that different sympathetic values have been attributed to various regions. Since all the men of a single civilization represent space in the same way, it is clearly necessary that these sympathetic values, and the distinctions which depend upon them, should be equally universal, and that almost necessarily implies that they be of social origin.

It is well known that these ideas were rehearsed by Durkheim elsewhere in his oeuvre, from the point of view of anthropology most significantly perhaps in his and Mauss' *Primitive Classification* (1963). It is also known that he obtained many of his insights on the nature of space from the work of Fustel de Coulanges on ancient Greek urban civilization. What I believe of importance about Durkheim's ideas on our 'categories of understanding', however, is that, as Alfred Gell has noted (1992), they place a sociological problem in an explicit philosophical framework. Durkheim refers his disquisitions on the nature of the categories of understanding to Kant's 'transcendental idealism'. We have already seen what Kant's ideas on the subject were. What Durkheim does is to rework them by using sociology. Social relationships, he argues, mediate our experience of the world; that is, we gain a sense of what space is through our life as social beings, through the collective representations that we hold as members of a particular society. In effect, therefore, what Durkheim does is to "promote sociological analysis to the level of metaphysics, by identifying collective representations... with Kantian 'categories'" (Gell, 1992: 5).

The Durkheimian approach has had a pervasive influence on anthropology. The idea that the organization of space represents social relationships through ideological structures permeated, if under different guises, much of what was written in anthropology until the mid 1970s (see, for example: Ardener, 1981; Douglas, 1966; Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 1966). Roughly speaking, space, in this structuralist tradition, was held to be a classificatory scheme imposed upon the world to invest it with meaning. This was effected through the use, as we heard Durkheim say, of 'divisions and differentiations', that is, of series of structural oppositions and contrasts.²⁷

²⁷ It is worth pointing out here that the idea of opposition, Rodney Needham has argued, is a relational metaphor derived from a spatial intuition (1987).

The structural analysis of space as a symbolic code and a mirror image of social categories and systems of classifications presented a number of problems that are well known and have been amply discussed in the literature (with regard to space see, for example: Moore, 1996: 3-9, 79-97). Of these, perhaps the most significant was the accusation about structuralism being an ahistorical approach, meaning that the actual relationship between cultural representations and what people did in their everyday lives was only very poorly accounted for. It was pointed out that the structuralist approach effected a subordination of the individual to the structural logic of the social system - social agency was sacrificed for the sake of structural coherence. Out of the critique of structuralism came the bulk of so-called 'theories of practice', of which Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) and Anthony Giddens' (1984) are perhaps the best known (although see Bhaskar, 1979).²⁸ Bourdieu's theory fits particularly well our concerns here since he himself developed it in the context of an analysis of the organization of space of the Kabyle house (1973). Bourdieu's work is well known so I shall deal with it briefly. In his ethnography Bourdieu shows how the material and symbolic layout of the Kabyle house is organized so that the experience of being and moving around the house is integrated, through the use of metaphor and symbolic homologous structures, to ideas about cosmology (1977: 90):

The interior of the Kabyle house, rectangular in shape, is divided into two parts by a low wall: the larger of these two parts, slightly higher than the other, is reserved for human use; the other side, occupied by the animals, has a loft above it. A door with two wings gives access to both rooms. In the upper part is the hearth and facing the door, the weaving loom. The lower, dark, nocturnal part of the house, the place of damp, green or raw objects - water jars set on the benches on either side of the entrance to the stable or against 'the wall of darkness', wood, green fodder - the place too of natural beings - sleep, sex, birth - and also of death, is opposed to the high, light-filled, noble place of humans and in particular of the guest, fire and fire-made objects, the lamp, kitchen-utensils, the rifle - the attribute of the manly point of honour

²⁸ More recently, these 'theories of practice' have been dubbed 'non-representational theories' (see, for example: Thrift 1996, 1997).

(nif) which protects female honour (hurma) - the loom, the symbol of all protection, the place also of the two specifically cultural activities performed within the house, cooking and weaving. The meaning objectified in things or places is fully revealed only in the practices structured according to the same schemes which are organised in relation to them (and vice versa).

For Bourdieu, symbolic meanings are not inherent in the organization of space, in the material layout of things and places, but have to be invoked through the activities of social actors; that is, through the experience of living the spatial symbolism of the house, social structures become embodied and naturalized in day-to-day activities. What Bourdieu is therefore telling us is that the spatial order has no fixed meaning which exists outside social practices. The set of practices that produce and reproduce the structures that they embody Bourdieu calls 'habitus': a generative and structuring set of collective strategies and common schemes of perception and conception which is used to reproduce existing structures. This 'dualist' (Thrift, 1996: 69) conception of social structures as both informing and being informed by practices is a complicated if not a tautological one (Cf. Farnell, 2000). Henrietta Moore, whose own analysis on the organization of household space among the Marakwet of Kenya draws heavily on Bourdieu's theory of practice, has argued that Bourdieu manages to escape the circularity of such reasoning through the use of metaphor (1996: 85):

[Bourdieu] does not discuss the concept of metaphor in any detail, but he does introduce the notion of "universes of meaning" and "universes of practice," as a way of explaining how the organization of space comes to have different meanings in different contexts. He argues that if the meaning of the material world is reducible to a few basic contrasts, these contrasts are only faintly determining and obtain in many different universes of practice, having particular meanings within each universe. In other words, meaning is invoked through practice and is thus context dependent.

Moore's own work is an attempt to expand the theoretical possibilities of the metaphorical analogy. To this end, she turns to Geertz's conception of culture as a 'text'. More importantly, she probes deeper into this idea by building upon Paul Ricoeur's

conception of all human action as being analogous to a text. Spatial and literary texts, Moore argues, have similar properties: “physical movement in and through space simultaneously inscribes the text (writing), acts within it (speech), and provides an interpretation of it (reading)” (Moore, 1996: 89). What distinguishes the analysis of literary texts from the analysis of spatial texts, however, is that “actual bodily movement through and action in ordered space are simultaneously both action and interpretation; they are therefore intelligible as an act of reading, where reading itself is understood as conjoined decoding and interpretation” (Moore, 1996: 91). This is, in turn, what allows the interpretation of spatial texts (in Moore’s sense) to afford the *practical* (that is, through practice) transformation of structures. For any action is both *eventful* and *meaningful* and, therefore, propitious to metaphorical re-elaboration: “Metaphor may be understood as strategic precisely because it is both event and meaning - through action meanings may be created, sustained or manipulated” (Moore, 1996: 83). That is, through the use of metaphor the meaning of an action may be referred to events dependent upon other contexts.

In my opinion, Moore’s monograph is the foundational text of spatial anthropology. In an effort that I deem remarkable she updated the discipline’s concern with space, unscrambling and detaching the concept from its long dated Durkheimian affiliation. Her ideas and insights are still today, fourteen years after publication, surprisingly fresh. And this despite the current vogue, in geography, feminism and postcolonial studies, with ‘the spatial’. This said, there is one step which I think Moore only just fell short of taking, even if the idea is there in her analysis, germinating and waiting to be taken further. Moore, with Bourdieu, talks of the organization of space as being invoked through practice. In her account, practices call into existence structures, but do so through the mediation of metaphorical actions; it is the playing out of an action through

metaphor that may refer its meaning to similar (analogous/homologous) events in other contexts. Moore recurs to the idea of the strategic instrumentality of metaphors because she fails to see that if practices invoke spaces, then practices are spatial. The idea is there in her analysis but she does not quite manage to formulate it explicitly. For there is an important difference, I think, between the idea of social activities producing and reproducing spaces as they unfold through them, and the idea of social practices being inherently and constitutively spatial. In the latter account, space need not be invoked to come into existence for it is always there, a dimension intrinsic to social relationships. It is the playing out of one form or another of social relationships that puts into existence (rather than calling, as Moore and Bourdieu suggest) a particular set of structures.

Later accounts of space in anthropology come close to adopting this position, although, again, the agency of space (that is, the inherent spatiality of practices) is never openly acknowledged. (The opening of ontology to such an affirmation - within the social sciences - has come from the field of geography, as we shall soon see.) Amongst the best known of all such later accounts are the analyses of urban spaces and urban built environments by Setha Low (1996), Margaret Rodman's notion of 'multilocality' and the power of place (Rodman, 1992), and Nancy Munn's 'construction of regional worlds in experience' (Munn, 1990).

Low's interest is in the study of the 'spatialization' of human experience, by which she means the location, both physically and conceptually, of social relations and social practices in social space (1996: 861). To this end, she distinguishes between the 'social construction' and the 'social production of space', the former alluding to the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space, the latter being reserved for the ideological (political, economic, social and historic) factors that produce and shape the form of the material landscape. Low's analytical distinction is useful for it helps to place

in perspective the social character of space. In the last analysis, however, it seems to me that Low's distinction is little more than a reformulation of the practice vs. structure dichotomy, if, perhaps, conveniently enveloped in a spatial terminology. Seen in this light, her analysis begs the question of how structures and practices inform each other, a problem that Moore at least attempted to solve through the mediation of strategic metaphors. Low, with Lefebvre, does say that social space is a whole, meaning, presumably, that social life is spatial (1996: 863). Her analysis, however, quickly betrays this assertion, for she then goes on to split the 'whole' of social space into socially constructed and socially produced spaces, and to attempt their reconciliation through what she calls a 'dialogical' framework. This is a strange and curious intellectual move since in the review of the literature that is available to her Low acknowledges the influence of thinkers such as Foucault, Lefebvre and Bourdieu, all of whom clearly opposed dichotomic expressions of the kind she adopts.

Writing four years before Low, Margaret Rodman managed to advance a number of propositions that are somehow closer to the ideas that are currently in vogue amongst those with an interest in social space. Rodman's concern is with questioning the concept of place as it figures in standard anthropological theory. For Rodman, anthropology has taken place for granted: "anthropologists... often assume that place is unproblematic. It is simply location. It is where people do things... insufficient attention has been paid to conceptualizing place in anthropology as something other than a physical setting" (Rodman, 1992: 640-641). For Rodman, place is still a territorial construct, that is, she still makes a distinction between social practices and the arena where they unfold. This said, Rodman is careful in noting that place cannot be unequivocally equated with an "inert container" (1992: 641). Borrowing from and building her account on recent developments in geography, notably those by Entrikin (1991), Rodman advances a

position in which she argues for the understanding of place as ‘lived space’. With Entrikin, Rodman argues that “places not only feature in inhabitants’... narratives, they are narratives in their own right” (1992: 642). This comes close to asserting, although again is never explicitly formulated, that social practices (narratives) have an inherent spatial dimension to them. Indeed, at one point, Rodman goes as far as noting that “places come into being through praxis, not just through narratives” (1992: 642). The narrative-like (or practice-like) structure of places, she goes on to argue, bestows each place of a “unique reality” (1992: 643). This allows her to advocate the notion of ‘multilocality’, that is, for an understanding of places as “politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions” (1992: 641), where different strands of narratives and practices compete and overlap for the institutionalization of meaning.

Rodman’s analysis of place comes very close to the position that I am myself arguing for (or will be, throughout this thesis). There is one point, though, at which I depart from her. By making a distinction between place and practices (or narratives) I think Rodman indulges slightly in the fetishisation of the idea of place. In other words, I do not think that Rodman, despite her analytical distinction, manages to supersede entirely the idea of place as a territorial construct. (In her discharge I should add that this happens because her discussion is centred on the category of place which, unlike space, has very specific, geographical connotations.)

The geographical undertone to Rodman’s problematization of place brings us to the literature on the anthropology of landscape. In discussing this topic I shall follow Eric Hirsch’s very useful theoretical synthesis (1995a)²⁹. Hirsch starts off by pointing out that

²⁹ I shall review here Hirsch’s analysis of the concept of landscape. Hirsch, however, has also written on the event-like structure of History (Hirsch, 1994). In this his previous work, Hirsch’s writings parallel

there are two basic poles of experience through which social life is constructed (1995a: 3):

an ordinary, workaday life and an ideal, imagined existence, vaguely connected to, but still separate from, that of the everyday. We can consider the first as 'foregrounded' in order to suggest the concrete actuality of everyday social life ('the way we now are'). The second we can consider as a 'background', in order to suggest the perceived potentiality thrown into relief by our foregrounded existence ('the way we might be'). Defined in this way, then, landscape entails a relationship between the 'foreground' and 'background' social life.

The distinction between the everyday and the ideal is but one of a number of analogous oppositions: place and space; inside and outside; image and representation. What is important, Hirsch goes on to argue, is to bear in mind that experience is never constructed in an 'either-or' form but as a perpetual flux between each pole: "Foreground actuality and background potentiality exist in a process of mutual implication, and as such everyday life can never attain the idealized features of a representation" (Hirsch 1995a: 23). Landscape is thus seen as the emerging form of such a relationship - landscape as a cultural process.

According to Hirsch, the actual form of the relationship between the poles at any particular point in time will depict the mode through which a people endeavour to foreground their background representations. I call such an endeavour an effort in 'coping' with their environment. My use of the verb is positive and encompassing, meaning that it denotes both an affirmative act of appropriation ('what we want now', i.e. agency) and an appraisal of circumstantial factors ('that which we are allowed', i.e.

those of Nancy Munn, whose own work on temporality (temporality and history having close conceptual affinities) I shall review below. For both Hirsch and Munn, events are not to be understood, as Marshall Sahlins put it, as 'happenings', but as 'stages of engagement' (my formulation). (In this, Hirsch is following Marilyn Strathern's definition of an event as a 'performance'.) This is essentially an idea that stresses the non-linearity of history, its understanding as something other than a simple concatenation of events.

structure)³⁰. In this light, landscape emerges as a predicate of our acts of ‘coping’. It is, therefore, a representation inherent to what we do, that is, to our practices. The point I am trying to make is that landscape can only be a predicate of our actions if our actions are constitutively spatial. This may be a trivial point to make but is one that has been conspicuously obviated in the literature. The foreground-background distinction provides for a useful *processual* analysis of landscape (and space). As such, however, it still conceives of people’s engagement in and with the world in essentially dualist (Cartesian) terms. To visualize space as a *capacity*, however, that is, as a dimension inherent to our practices, allows us to think of the subject in continuous engagement with the world. That is, an understanding of being-in-the-world as a *mode of comportment* (see footnote 6). (I ought to point out here that Hirsch has also written of landscape as a *moment* of a process of elicitation, a conception akin to what I mean by the use of the word ‘capacity’ for space³¹.)

An important source of inspiration for both Hirsch and, before, Rodman, is the work of anthropologist Nancy Munn. I think that the work of Munn, along with that of Alfred Gell (1992), is the closest that anthropology has come to producing a truly spatial social

³⁰ I take my use of the verb ‘to cope’ from Heidegger’s philosophy (1997, 1999). For Heidegger, being-in-the-world does not consist of a disengaged subject but is rather “an average *mode of comportment*, a skilful coping which consists of a shared readiness to deal ‘appropriately’ with people and things” (Thrift, 1996: 11). The word that Heidegger employs to denote such average mode of comportment is *Ereignis*, which could be translated for something like ‘a becoming-of-seizures’, or ‘a becoming-of-appropriations’ (Heidegger, 1999).

³¹ The Fuyuge, Hirsch has written, conceive of their *gab* ritual as a moment where ‘truths’ are revealed. The ritual takes place in a village that has been constructed for the occasion. Village and ritual are therefore implicated in a process of revelation, of unconcealing: “what we refer to as landscape and ritual are part of a coercive process whereby units are brought into existence resulting in a single, but momentary potential, or truth” (Hirsch, 1995b: 69). Village (landscape) and ritual need therefore to be understood as strategies of elicitation, *capacities* that make possible certain forms of action and of social relations. My argument is that it is space, not just landscape, that has capacity, for social relationships are always and everywhere *spatial*.

theory. This is probably explained by the fact that both Munn and Gell derive much of their insights from the field of time-geography (I shall talk about time-geography later).

Munn's concern is with stressing

that for the subject a regional world is not given, but lived... Instead of considering the formation of a regional order through the structure and functioning of given social forms such as types of social organisation, exchange or communication, I am concerned with its ongoing formation in certain experiential syntheses that actors create in practices, and the events that transpire in their terms (Munn, 1990: 2)

Munn's interest is in understanding the ways in which sets of specific spatio-temporal practices create 'moments' of social experience through which the 'present' is fabricated as a regional world. What Munn is therefore arguing is that the spatial framework of an actor's practices keeps shifting and realigning itself to the orientation, horizon and deployment of the practices themselves. That is, practices make spaces, and these transpire and come into existence as spatio-temporal 'events'. This is why for Munn the subject of historical consciousness or historical memory is one of 'event history': the process through which certain spatio-temporal connectivities (a "specific nexus of events") are created in experience (Munn, 1990: 4). For Munn, therefore, the structure of space (her 'regional worlds') is event-like or practice-like.

There is a strand of thought in Munn's analysis that she barely follows up, and when she does it is only from the perspective of a Husserlian phenomenology of internal time consciousness. Munn writes: "at a given moment, any event is infused with an ambience of potentialities or 'futura', as well as pasts. Using Husserl's language and broadly applying his basic framework for the experience of temporal process, we might say that the event's 'essential [temporal] constitution' [1964: 29] involves both 'retentions' of the past and 'protentions' of the future. These may change as the contexts or 'presents' of an event's apprehension change, and as it engages different or added pasts and futures"

(1990: 5). The point that Husserl (and Munn) is trying to make here is that the structure of an event, that is, the conditions for its existence, always involves an appraisal of, and oscillation between, the horizon of possibilities that is open to it now and the horizon of possibilities that were once open to the events that preceded it. Munn takes this point to assert that history (that is, her ‘event history’) should not be understood as a concatenation of the events that have been, but as the structure of the events that were *and* could have been: “I do not mean that the kind of event history suggested here entails a *linear* time. On the contrary... the presupposition of a situated actor precludes linear temporality” (Munn, 1990: 14). This is so because, as her Gawan ethnography attempts to demonstrate, an unrealized, past event³² may acquire unexpected prominence and relevance in the construction of a future ‘present’.

The use that Munn makes of phenomenology is restricted to an understanding of the internal consciousness of time (temporality is, I believe, a better word). Yet the analysis of potentialities and actualities that she proposes for understanding the structure of temporality could just as well have been extended to space.³³ This is, in fact, what a geographer called Hägerstrand attempted to do back in the 1960s (via Giddens, Hägerstrand gets a reference in Munn’s analysis). The spatio-temporal approach he developed is known as time-geography. The influence of time-geography in social theory has been enormous, particularly so through the work of Anthony Giddens, in whose ‘structuration theory’ (1984) time-geography plays a fundamental part.

³² Such an ‘unrealized event’ would not, strictly speaking, be an *event*; rather, it would have presented itself to temporal consciousness as a *potentiality*.

³³ The distinction between the potentiality of an event and its actuality (its formal happening) is not unlike Moore’s (1996) formal split of the structure of metaphor into ‘meaning’ and ‘event’. The former is built upon phenomenological analysis, the latter upon hermeneutics. The parallelisms with Hirsch’s ‘foreground actuality’ and ‘background potentiality’ are even more noticeable. (See also, for example, Gell’s (1985) distinction between ‘indexical’ and ‘non-indexical’ forms of spatial representations.)

Anthropologists' *docta ignoratia* of the subject passes, therefore, as surprising, to say the least. To my knowledge, only Alfred Gell, in his work on the anthropology of time (1992), has made the effort of trying to make sense of (and ending up endorsing) such a body of literature. It might therefore be time that we got to see what geography has had to say on the subject of space.

*Geography (and Others)*³⁴

The amount of literature that geography has produced on the subject of space is vast, not the least because the topic lies at the core of the discipline. I shall here, therefore, only be concerned with two strands of theory.³⁵ These are time-geography and urban neo-Marxist geography (or Marxist and post-Marxist political economy). The reason for my choice is twofold. On the one hand, the impact that these strands of theory have had on social theory is enormous and cannot simply be obviated. On the other hand, and not altogether unrelated, these are both *theoretical* approaches to space and spatiality. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s there was a tradition in geography that thought that theory was more constraining than enabling. This was known as the 'humanistic' approach to geography (for example: Tuan, 1974, 1977; Relph, 1976). Humanistic geography aimed at finding a "common ground between its writers [geographers] and its subjects through a more or less direct appeal to "experience."... It marked the human subject with knowledges and skills and with emotions and feelings that were intrinsic to

³⁴ A superb account of the making of geography (and social theory in general) as a discourse on power, knowledge and spatiality is to be found in Gregory (1994). I draw heavily from this work in the summary that follows.

³⁵ For other views on space within geography, see, for example: Relph, 1976; Sack, 1980; Tuan, 1974, 1977.

human agency and to human beings” (Gregory, 1994: 78). Today, there is little left in the discourses of geography of the humanistic approach, for even the more experiential (eg. the ‘non-representational’ theories) of the discipline’s works are enveloped in theory. The publication, in 1973, of David Harvey’s *Social Justice and the City* was to seal, with time, the debate between ‘humanists’ and ‘theoreticians’ on almost all fronts. Moreover, Harvey’s work set a new agenda for geography by laying out the foundations of a rigorous *scientific* geography in a Marxist discourse. I shall now briefly present the most important of the ideas that Marxism has bequeathed to contemporary social theory on the subject of space.

With the publication of *Social Justice and the City* - indeed, throughout the whole of his oeuvre³⁶ - David Harvey’s concern was to upgrade historical materialism to a sort of historical-geographical materialism. Harvey re-read Marx’s political economy, disassociating from it the landscape of capitalism that traditional Marxism had taken for granted as a regional template or backdrop. Instead, “Harvey’s own inquiry was to show how Marx’s critique of capitalism assumed, tacitly but nonetheless centrally, the production of an urbanized space-economy” (Gregory, 1994: 92). Harvey showed that the forces of capitalism required an *urban* economy for their deployment. The development of cities, therefore, was not something extrinsic to capitalism (a cultural production, so to speak) but, rather, an intrinsic moment of the capitalist mode of production itself. Urban spaces are *produced* by capitalism because they are the environmental expression of the system:

We know that capitalism has survived into the twentieth century in part through the production of an increasingly urbanized space... Capitalism has produced a “second nature” through urbanization and the creation of built environments of extraordinary breadth and intricacy. It has also produced a new kind of human nature through the urbanization of

³⁶ See, for example: Harvey, 1985, 1989, 1990.

consciousness and the production of social spaces and a particular structure of interrelations between the different loci of consciousness formation. But these second natures, though produced out of the capitalist mode of production and circulation, are not necessarily consistent with the easy perpetuation of capital accumulation and its dominant class relations. Indeed, with time they often become key barriers. The urban process then appears as both fundamental to the perpetuation of capitalism and a primary expression of its inner contradictions now expressed as produced external constraints. Capitalism has to confront the consequences of its urban structurations at each moment in its history. The produced second natures become the raw materials out of which new configurations of capitalist activity, new productive forces and new social relations must be wrought. The capitalist dynamic is forced to tear down much of what it has built in order to survive. The axe of creative destruction falls not only on capital made obsolescent before its time but on the skills of the worker and on the roles of the family, individualism, community, and state (Harvey, 1985: 273).

This is why Harvey, with Lefebvre, speaks of ‘the production of space’. In the last analysis, both Harvey and Lefebvre are in fact making even more daring contentions. For they both hold that the collective representations and structural forms of contemporary society (‘the urbanization of consciousness’ in Harvey’s terminology; ‘everyday life’ and ‘true space’, in Lefebvre’s) are mediated and shaped, if not actually produced, by the material and symbolic landscapes of capitalism. We have already seen, if briefly, what lies at the core of Harvey’s intellectual project. I shall therefore move on now to examine in a little bit more of detail what Lefebvre means by ‘everyday life’ and how does he understand the problem of space.

Lefebvre’s thought is often seen as part of a tradition of humanist Marxism (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty) that aimed at unearthing the original capacities and creative faculties of Man, buried, as they are, beneath a constellation of power-knowledge (ideological) discourses (Shields, 1999). In this light, Lefebvre’s critique of ‘everyday life’ (Lefebvre, 1971) comes as an elaboration of Marx’s theory of alienation (see, for example, Ollman, 1971). For Lefebvre, ‘everyday life’ is “the domain that is enframed, constrained, and colonized by the space of the commodity and the territory of the state; it is a product of

modernity” (Gregory, 1994: 363).³⁷ Lefebvre argues that everyday life has been colonized by capitalism through the installation of an ideological regime that he calls “true space”. This is an artificial construct that has conflated into one all the possibilities of space, namely, ‘mental space’ (the space of knowledge and logic, of mathematics, engineers and planners), ‘social space’ (symbolic and meaningful spaces, the space of ‘practical’ knowledge, lived space) and ‘physical space’ (‘real’ space, spaces that are fabricated and used):

True space, the space of philosophy and of its epistemological offshoot, seamless in all but an abstract sense, wrapped in the mantle of science, takes form and is formulated in the head of a thinker before being projected onto social and even physical ‘reality’. Every effort is made to legitimize it by appealing to knowledge and to the formal kernel of knowledge. It is thanks to true space that we witness the rise of ‘theoretical man’ - the rise of the human realm reduced to the realm of knowledge, conceptualization passed off as direct experience... True space is a mental space whose dual function is to reduce ‘real’ space to the abstract and to induce minimal differences. Dogmatism of this kind serves the most nefarious enterprises of economic and political power. Science in general and each scientific specialization separately are the immediate servants of both administration and production within the framework of the dominant mode of production (Lefebvre, 1991: 398).

True space is a spatial discourse of domination and subjugation that has boldly managed to veil and disguise its own spatial dimension - the space that colonizes everyday life. Such colonization takes place through one (or more) of the following spatial discourses (Lefebvre, 1991: 33):

³⁷ I will expand this by further quoting from Gregory’s superb synthesis of Lefebvre’s thought (1994: 401), which is much better than anything I could afford within a reasonable word limit:

“First, modernity is shaped by an intensified *commodification of space*, which imposes a geometric grid of property relations and property markets on the earth, and an intensified *commodification through space*, which involves the installation of economic grids of capital circulation by means of which abstract space inscribes abstract labour and the commodity form. Second, modernity is shaped by a heightened *bureaucratization of space*, whereby each administrative system “maps out its own territory, stakes it out and signposts it,” [Lefebvre, 1971: 160] and a heightened *bureaucratization through space*, which involves the installation of juridico-political grids by means of which social life is subject to systematic surveillance and regulation by the state.”

- 1 *Spatial practice*, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristics of each social formation...
- 2 *Representations of space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose...
- 3 *Representational spaces*, embodying complex symbolisms... linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life...

Through each and every one of these spatial modalities, a society's true space is generalized and naturalized, the experience of 'lived' space annihilated by the ideological representations of abstract (spatial) thought. Space, therefore, becomes a secretion of a mode of thought, or, to use Lefebvre's own wording, of a 'mode of production'. The implication of this is that "every society - and hence every mode of production with its subvariants (i.e. all those societies which exemplify the general concept) - produces a space, its own space" (Lefebvre, 1991: 31). In other words, that the spatial inheres in the social. There are many more subtleties to Lefebvre's ideas on the production of space. For my purposes here, however, I think that this very brief introduction to his thought will suffice.

Lefebvre's writings have received considerable critical acclaim. Within geography in particular there have been plenty of engagements with his work. This said, there have also been some skeptical receptions. Tim Unwin, for instance, has criticised Lefebvre on five fronts (Unwin, 2000: 26):

First, by using the word 'space', Lefebvre ties himself to old notions of space which prevent him from achieving the radical task that he set himself. Second, by insisting on separating notions of space from time, he is unable to develop the comprehensive framework for which he was seeking. Third, by concentrating on the process of the production of space, he fails to address the complex everyday lived processes which help to shape human experiences, particularly those that generate inequality. Fourth, he did not sufficiently indicate how his notion of the production of space will necessarily and actually lead to a transformation of society; and fifth, his notion of place is confused and poorly articulated.

I think that most of Unwin's criticisms can be boiled down to one: the insistence, on Lefebvre's part, to think of space as a secretion of the mode of production of a society. Such a Marxist perspective leads Lefebvre to lose sight from 'everyday lived processes', from non-Western and non-urban realms of experience, in sum, from the spatiality of the agent, any agent. But I also think that there is much in Lefebvre's analysis that one can retain, even if we are to do without his Marxist approach. The idea that social relationships produce spaces (physical, mental and social) is a brilliant one. For here Lefebvre is not saying, *a la* Durkheim, that social relationships, through their deployment and appropriation of space, divide and differentiate a territory that they are therefore reifying as a category of thought. What Lefebvre is saying is that social relationships *are* spatial: "Social relations... have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial*" (Lefebvre, 1991: 404). His own position is to advance in the analysis of the connections between this underpinning and the relations it supports by using Marxist theory. But this need not be the case. In fact, over the past decade, the most creative explorations of Lefebvre's insights have come from the broadly defined field of critical cultural theory (feminists, Chicana and Black scholars, and postcolonial theorists). A brief word, then, about these approaches.

The most comprehensive and Lefebvrian of all such approaches is, perhaps, that of Edward Soja (1996, 1999). Juxtaposing some of Lefebvre's ideas with recent feminist retheorizations of spatiality and the work of postcolonial theorists, Soja has developed his own notion of 'Thirdspace' (1999: 276):

Thirdspace as Lived Space is portrayed as multi-sided and contradictory, oppressive and liberating, passionate and routine, knowable and unknowable. It is a space of radical openness, a site of resistance and struggle, a space of multiplicitous representations, investigatable through its binarized oppositions but also where *il y a toujours l'Autre*, where there are always 'other' spaces, heterotopologies, paradoxical geographies to be explored. It is a meeting ground, a site of hybridity and *mestizaje* and moving beyond entrenched boundaries, a margin or edge where ties can be severed and also where new ties can be

forged. It can be mapped out but never captured in conventional cartographies; it can be creatively imagined but obtains meaning only when practised and fully *lived*.

Soja's notion of Thirdspace develops Lefebvre's ideas on 'lived space' by expanding the possibilities of his trialectics. As it is deployed throughout *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre's thought is set out as an enterprise in superseding the dialectical (if not dichotomic) frame of mind that rules much of Western theory-building. This we see in the series of conceptual triads that he uses throughout his work, for example: mental, physical and social spaces; spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces. As Soja has written, in Lefebvre we always find "an-Other term, a third possibility that works to break down the categorically closed logic of the 'either-or' in favour of a different, more flexible and expansive logic of the 'both-and-also'" (Soja, 1999: 268). Soja has labelled Lefebvre's approach as 'critical thirding-as-Other'. In his own words: "This Othering does not derive simply and sequentially from the original binary opposition and/or contradiction, but seeks instead to disorder, deconstruct and tentatively reconstitute in a different form the entire dialectical sequence and logic" (Soja, 1999: 269). This can only be done by adopting a "radical epistemological openness", a theoretical disposition towards the "continuous expansion of knowledge formation", a disposition that will, of necessity, lead us to the exploration of "'other spaces'" (Soja, 1999: 269). Soja backs his claim that the exploration of such 'other spaces' is not only necessary but also possible by drawing on the works of feminist and post-colonial critics such as, for example, African American writer bell hooks³⁸, Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa or the artist and urban critic Rosalyn Deutsche (Soja, 1996). I

³⁸ Born Gloria Jean Watkins, early in her career hooks adopted and lower cased her nom de plume from that of her outspoken great-grandmother, Bell Hooks. Her argument is that the decapitalization and the pseudonym are attempts to take the reader's focus away from the author and place it on the content of the work.

shall deal here very briefly with the work of hooks to illustrate the use that Soja makes of the writings of these authors.

In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, her most spatial work, hooks provides several very expressive descriptions of what it means to be a radical woman of colour in the United States (1990). These descriptions spell out the relationships between space, place and black identity. As Henrietta Moore, commenting on the work of hooks, has written (1994: 81):

To leave certain spaces and pass into others is to know in your body what the differences of race involve; it is to know oppression and discrimination intimately in a way which does not allow for the separation of the physical from the mental. The powerful symbolism of notions of place, location and positionality in contemporary feminist theory demonstrates just how much we come to know through our bodies, and how much our theorizing is dependent on that knowledge. The multiple nature of subjectivity is experienced physically, through practices which can be simultaneously physical and discursive.

Our physical, lived experience of the world, therefore, is an experience which makes, through incorporation, that is, through practical embodiment, the geography of our everyday struggles. In this line of thought, space is, again, that which we make of it: a secretion of our quotidian bodily engagement with the world. It is with such a view of space in mind that bell hooks writes (1990: 153):

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance - as a location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle... We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world.

hooks' spatialization of radical subjectivity and political practice may seem to many figurative if not rhetorical. Soja is attracted to it for its potentiality in opening up 'lived space' as an ontological category of 'critical thirding-as-Other'. In keeping up to his

commitment of looking for 'other spaces', hooks' radical positionality thus provides a case in point for Soja's Thirdspace.

I think that both hooks' radical spatial politics and Soja's appropriation of it are useful developments. They can be read as very successful exercises in the expansion of our geographical imagination. They bring back space from the realm of the external to the realm of practice. Space, hooks and Soja are saying, is that which we do and that which we want to become. Space is therefore a becoming (and a-coming) - a predicate of our actions. My only concern with their writings is that they may create some suspicion amongst social scientists for their use of metaphor and figurative speech. For that reason, I shall now turn to time-geography. The conclusions that I shall draw from the studies on time-geography are not unlike those that I have distilled from Soja's work: that space is a practical category. But they are clothed in the formal jargon of social theory and are therefore less prone to attack for their academic insubstantiality.

The first explicit discussions of time-geography appeared in the 1960s, in the highly innovative work of the Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand. Hägerstrand's main aim was to find a geographical vocabulary that could describe biographies, or the movements of people and objects, as paths of time-space. People, Hägerstrand noted, have moving patterns of their own, with turning points at their place of work, shops, their friends' homes and other similar locales. Such an understanding of biographies allowed Hägerstrand to represent a social system as a network of individual 'paths' of people flowing in time-space. These were later mapped out in three-dimensional diagrams (his famous 'web models'). Using this mapping convention, it is possible to identify the wheres and whens of social interactions, therefore illuminating the space-time interdependencies through which social life is given a coherence, a structure.

Moreover, the use of space-time to disclose a society's 'structure' (in this its time-geographical sense) further enlightens us towards the following:

1. [that] space and time are *resources* on which individuals have to draw in order to realise particular *projects*, subject to:
2. three *constraints*:
 - capability constraints which define space-time paths [eg. human beings cannot be physically in two places at one time, cannot move instantaneously from place to place, etc.],³⁹
 - coupling constraints which defines space-time bundles [i.e. constraints that govern social interactions, such as co-presence, communication, etc.];
 - steering constraints which define space-time domains [i.e. constraints that define what is socially permitted].
3. [that] these constraints are interactive rather than additive, and their prisms delineate a series of *possibility boundaries* in space and time which correspond to (map out) an underlying and evolving 'logic' or 'structure' (Gregory, 1985: 308).

Hägerstrand's time-geography may therefore be read, as Alfred Gell has put it (1992: 197):

[as] an analytical language for exploring social systems, not simply a descriptive language for representing objects and events distributed in space and time. It is a language in which it is possible to construct permutable structural models which represent both the spatio-temporal relationships in the environment which are the geographers' primary concern, and also the implicit dimension of social ideas which are embodied in these relationships.

Time-geography tells us to what uses, that is, to what *practices*, people decide to allocate the space-time resources of which their lives are inherently made. It therefore tells us what are the opportunity costs that people face in their engagements with the world. "Opportunity cost", Alfred Gell has written, "provides the bridging concept between subjectivity and objectivity in the sociological interpretation of action in the world... it is only because... this world lies at the centre of a penumbra of alternative

³⁹ The underlying assumption here is that human beings are indivisible, that is, individuals. In fact, much could be argued against such an understanding of the category of the person and its implied physicality. This is, as it is well known, one of the issues that troubled Lévy-Bruhl and that led him to argue for the

possible worlds that opportunity costs arise, because the ‘possibilities forgone’... are computed not in terms of one world, but in terms of one (real) world and all of its accessible (unrealized) alternative worlds” (Gell, 1992: 323). In other words, in choosing what set of practices we will enact out and engage in we are also choosing what world we want to live in. We are therefore choosing one of many possible alternative spaces of sociality. In sum, through our engagements with and in the world, we become the spaces to which we have invested our practices. We are but a becoming of space.

3.3 Conclusion

In this conclusion I want to bring together some of the arguments of philosophy and social theory that have been presented in the preceding sections. The thread that runs through both bodies of thought, I contend, is that of politics, or, rather, that of change and its possibilities. In this concluding remarks I intend to argue that space, because it is something that we do, because it is a practical category, it is, also, charged with power: the power to open up possibilities. In this context, I prefer to speak of space as a *capacity*, that is, as both potency and spaciousness. This quality of space brings forth and illuminates its inherent political dimension.

At the end of the introductory section dedicated to the philosophy of space I mentioned the ‘opening’ of physical space to time that was brought about by Einstein’s development of the special theory of relativity. I remarked that this development needed to be read as a step forward in the elucidation of the connections between space and matter. The idea that space and matter are intimately related is as old as Western

‘pre-logical’ mentality of ‘primitive’ people (for a general introduction to Lévy-Bruhl’s thought see, for example, Cazeneuve, 1972).

philosophy itself. The problem that the relationship poses is that of motion: if space is made of matter, how could matter itself move anywhere? Alternatively, if space and matter were distinct realities, where would space stand?; that is, what would contain the space that contains matter? The theory of relativity came up with a third alternative: the shape of space will change as the distribution of matter changes. Space, therefore, would be a shifting reality, a-becoming rather than a-given.

The idea that space may change shape as it acts and reacts to changes in matter has recently made its way to social theory. It has required, however, a prior ontological-cum-epistemological shift from a concern on 'being' to an interest in 'becomings':

The concept of space for which I want to argue is one that holds that space is open and dynamic. That is... 'space' cannot be a closed system: it is not stasis, it is not defined negatively as an absence of temporality, it is not the classic 'slice through time'. Indeed, the closed-system/slice-through-time imagination of space denies the possibility of a real temporality - for there is no mechanism from moving from one slice to the next. Rather the spatiality that I envisage would be open, would be constantly in the process of being made... It would be integral to space-time (Massey, 1999: 264-265)

Doreen Massey's arguments in favour of a geography of 'becomings' rather than 'essences' are part of what has been termed the 'spatial turn' of the humanities and social sciences. This chapter has been primarily dedicated at reviewing some of the literature of which this 'turn' is made up of. There is more to this 'turn', however, than the mere spatialization of theory. The 'temporalization' of space, as I called it right at the beginning of this chapter, has more implications to it than the merely analytical. To open space to time, that is, to open space to movement and change, is to open it to choices and possibilities. It implies an awareness of other possible spaces, of other possible social paths, of other possible histories. In the words of Massey (1999: 271-272):

for there to be multiple trajectories - for there to be coexisting differences - there must be space, and for there to be space there must be multiple trajectories. Thus... a more adequate

understanding of spatiality for our times would entail the recognition that there is more than one story going on in the world and that these stories have, at least, a relative autonomy.

Or, as Michel de Certeau put it: “Every story is a travel story - a spatial practice. For this reason, spatial practices concern everyday tactics, are part of them” (1984: 115); where:

a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus... The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power... It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them (de Certeau, 1984: 36-37).

These, I contend, are unashamedly political claims. They are claims for the recognition and respect of other fields of action, of other desires and projects; claims, in sum, for the acknowledgement of difference. They stand along the same line as bell hooks’ and Edward Soja’s claims in favour of the spatialization of radical subjectivities and political practice. In this light, the recent spatial turn is concerned with the mapping out of geographies of difference (of ‘geographies of resistance’, in Steve Pile’s and Michael Keith’s (1994) terminology). It is this same idea that I take to lie at the heart of Gell’s revision of the anthropology of time (and, implicitly, of space) and his call for the incorporation of the notion of ‘opportunity cost’ into general anthropological theory. The concept of ‘opportunity cost’ allows us to think of our practices as ‘world-creating’ actions: every choice we make contains within it an idea of the world that we want to live in, thereby helping to constitute it in the process. This is also what lies at the core of Hägerstrand’s time-geography, “to capture”, as Nigel Thrift has put it, “the pragmatic sense of possibility inherent in the practical situations of ‘going-on’” (Thrift, 1996: 9).

I shall conclude these remarks by recourse to a final strand of theory that I believe brings together the arguments of philosophy and social theory, and the problematic of

the politics of space, with which this chapter has been concerned. I am referring here to actor-network theory (see, for example: Thrift, 1996; Strathern, 1996; Law and Hassard, 1999; Law and Mol, 2000; Law, 2000).⁴⁰

Actor-network theory (ANT) is a body of sociological thought that is concerned not with the ways in which things are ordered but with the ways in which they happen, that is, with their 'modes of ordering' (Law, 2000). Actor-network theory holds that objects and agents are effects of arrays of relations, of networks. They are, therefore, contingent achievements: a thing is what it is only insofar as the relations that hold it together do not change their shape. In its crudest expression, ANT may be understood as a 'semiotics of materiality' (Law, 1999: 4). For example:

a *vessel* can be imagined as a network: a network of hull, spars, sails, ropes, guns, food stores, sleeping quarters - not to mention its human crew... if this network holds steady then so does the vessel... The vessel *is an effect of its relations with other entities*, and the ANT analysis explores the strategies which generate - and are generated by - its objectness. Which secure it. The syntaxes or the discourses which hold it in place rather than revealing its essential fragility and its dissolution (Law, 2000: 4-5)

Thus, in actor-network theory it is not just humans that have agency. Human and non-human entities alike co-participate in the constitution of networks. This means that different networks, each made up by different entities of varying capabilities and constraints, will have different forms or spatialities. This is but a rephrasing of the standard philosophical view of space as a relational construct. It is also a reformulation of how conjunctural differences are made up and sustained. Actor-network theory therefore tells us a second story about how arrangements that are relational and, for that reason, precarious, get reproduced or transformed in time. If an element of the network

⁴⁰ Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern is a major contributor to ANT (1991, 1996, 1999). Her contributions have shown that ANT and anthropology have grounds in common and how academic dialogue between the disciplines can benefit both schools.

changes position, or scales up or down its capabilities, then the network changes. This is important because it implies an acknowledgement of networks having their own spatialities, their own fields of force. As Annemarie Mol has put it: “we may imagine actor-network theory as a machine for waging war on Euclidianism” (paraphrased in Law, 1999: 7). I shall briefly spell out this last point next.

Actor-network theory is not just a body of thought that encourages people to think in terms of relations. Its claims - and its presuppositions - are profounder: they are *ontological*, referring to what ultimately constitutes reality (Mol, 1999). (This is why its claims affect human and non-human entities alike.) Unlike perspectivalism, which suggests that reality is one, if liable of numerous, even opposing interpretations; and unlike constructivism, which holds reality to be one of many possible alternative constructions (Mol, 1999); unlike perspectivalism and unlike constructivism, therefore, ANT holds reality to be ‘fractal’, that is, “more than one and less than many” (Law, 1999: 12): a contingent alliance of networks, shifting, retaining shapes - always in the making. In other words, reality can only be defined as an *emergence* of being, as a *becoming*. This means that it is no good to explain reality by pinning it down to just one ontic level, one level of occurrence. Reality is multidimensional. Why? Because one and the same element may participate of different network-objects, shifting alliances and reconstituting network-reality as it moves (or does not move) about. Such an understanding allows AN theorists to speak of objects (and people, one presumes) as “topologically multiple”, depending on the network-spaces (the spatial levels) that they may relate to. Let me go back to the example of the vessel.⁴¹

⁴¹ I take this example from Law (2000). Law’s analysis is more complicated and draws on topology, a branch of mathematics which explores the character of possible spaces. (It might be worth remembering here Edmund Leach’s attempt, back in 1961, to introduce topology into social anthropology as a means of finding generalized structural patterns; see Leach, 1971.)

The vessel is a network-object that depends on all its constitutive relations holding together in place in order to retain its shape. The sustaining of the relations may therefore be read as the concomitant performance of a network-space: the vessel *is* its own space. Moreover, the vessel does not exist in a vacuum, it is *also* an object *in* Cartesian or Euclidean space (regardless of the fact that Cartesian space is also a network performance). The vessel may therefore be seen to exist in or, rather, to be performing two spatialities: “*objects are always performed in a multi-topological manner*, and are dependent for their constancy on intersections between different topoi” (Law, 2000: 10).

The idea that space is a performance brings us back to the issue of choice, of the world as a horizon of opportunity costs. For if a network-reality is to be performed, to be called into existence, it might therefore seem that there is, or should be, a choice between the ways of doing so. In other words: we create spaces as we cope with the world that we live in; our act of ‘coping’ is a spatial act, a mode of comportment through which we lay out what we want or do not want to do with and in the world. Space is a moment of our choices, a fundamental dimension of an “ontological politics” (Mol, 1999). Space is a capacity.

CHAPTER FOUR

RHYTHMIC SPACES AND THE RHYTHM OF SPACE

This and the next two chapters bring forth most of the ethnography upon which this thesis is based. I have written the chapters with the intention that they would build up cumulatively. It is their sum total that makes the claims I sustain. With the exception of some passing remarks, the analysis and interpretation of the evidence presented in these chapters will be left for the Conclusion. However, because space is something we are used to look through, not for, a small dialectical reading effort between facts and analysis might be required to accommodate our vision.

In this chapter I intend to introduce the reader to the various ways through which the inhabitants of Antofagasta appropriate their city. I will attempt to show how the occupation of the city takes place through the spatial consumption of that which is not yet existent: places exist in virtue not of their given structures but of their social possibilities. The experience of urban life is, in Antofagasta, shaped by the practice and production of spaces rather than by the occupancy of places.

This is an essentially descriptive chapter. I shall not try to analyse the material presented here. I will content myself by guiding the reader through a number of spatial itineraries, from early in the morning in a weekday to a late night weekend hangout. The descriptions will hopefully succeed in familiarising the reader with the structure of quotidian life in Antofagasta by acquainting him with the social flows that shape the city. The snapshots of social life that I will present are intended to approximate the reader to the activities of students - most notably university students -, their own and very particular use of urban space; to the movements and circulation of women, casting

light on the remarkable gendering and, in the exercise of their maternal roles, ageing of space which their activities promote; to the different ways by which the city's encompassing desert environment is utilised and incorporated into the urban milieu. In all, the chapter will attempt to present the reader with the rhythm of everyday practices that 'build up' the city.

I shall start the chapter, however, by producing a brief account of how the city is perceived from the outside. I opt for such a strategy because I believe it is important to show how there are many readings to the rhythm of everyday life. In fact, there are many levels from which those readings can be made. I will introduce three such readings in an attempt to prove that only by being a *producer* oneself of the rhythms with which everyday life in the city is made can one 'rebuild' the urban environment which the flow of social relationships secretes. This chapter is an endeavour at mapping out such secretions.

2.1 Spatializing an Imaginary City

I had three virtual encounters with Antofagasta before I ever set foot in the city. Two months prior to my first fieldwork visit, in January 1997, the Spanish television (TVE2) showed a documentary about the Atacama Desert and the Pampa del Tamarugal in which there was a passing visual reference to the city. An aerial view of the harbour was shown and some remarks were made about a picturesque train loaded with copper plates still paralysing all city activities by having to make its way to the port through the city's heart. I have to admit that the commentary truly fulfilled my expectations as to the 'authenticity' and exoticness of my fieldwork destination.

The ephemerality of the images showed a quiet, orderly city. The view shown, I know now, was a panoramic vista of the city's north, too broad to depict any of the shanties that make up that sector and, for the same reason, misleading in its false portrayal of what looked like the semblance of a neo-colonial town: rows and rows of detached and semi-detached low-rise houses following a grid-iron street plan. The sky was clear and lent an atmosphere of transparency and immutability to the view. Otherwise, I do not remember much from the documentary other than the colourfulness of the built environment and the still tranquillity of the city's encompassing scenery - the Atacama Desert and the Pacific Ocean.

Even closer to the date of my departure, some three weeks before take off, I met the daughter of a professor at the University of Antofagasta, who then happened to be studying for a postgraduate degree in Madrid. She had left Antofagasta much earlier, however, at the age of seventeen, when she parted for Santiago to pursue her undergraduate education. "You have to bear in mind" I recall her saying as we sat down for a conversation that turned out to last for well over three hours, "that Antofagasta is a provincial town. I mean, it is not like Madrid, or Santiago - it is cosy and familiar." She went on to tell me how her father, the university professor, often went to watch the local football team in the company of some of his students; how close were the relationships between faculty members, with most living in the same neighbourhood and alternating in the organization of weekend barbecue parties; how fraternal and neighbourly everything was. She showed me a family photoalbum that she kept with her and commented on some pictures that had been taken in her parent's neighbourhood. I remarked how loosely settled the neighbourhood looked for one could see great extensions of land unpopulated. She nodded and said that that was *la Coviefi*, a suburban district mostly inhabited by university faculty staff and other middle class groups. "You can even see

the university if you look closely;" she added, "there, in the distance, verging with the sea. Students also tend to live in neighbourhoods adjacent to the university. Not as close as *la Coviefi*, though. Yet I guess one could probably speak of a university city - the campus, *la Coviefi* and the student's residential areas." I then asked her about the places I should look around for accommodation. She directed me to Gran Vía and Playa Blanca, two southern neighbourhoods that I later found out to be the student residential areas that she was referring to and as such part too of her virtual university city. Even the football stadium, where her father used to watch the CDA (*Club de Deportes Antofagasta*, Antofagasta's Sport Club) in the company of students, was part of the virtual city: only some metres away from the headquarters of the University of Antofagasta and itself part of the Gran Vía district.

Her representations of the city were neat and uncluttered. Everything had its own place. She spoke of the city's southern sectors as a uniform, smooth spatial continuum: from the University of Antofagasta's campus in the far south, pass *la Coviefi*, Playa Blanca, Gran Vía (and the football stadium!) and Avenida del Brasil, to the centre of town, Prat Street and the central square, Plaza Colón. For her, Antofagasta was a third of the city it actually turns out to be. With the exception of Avenida del Brasil and the centre of town, one could almost encapsulate the rest of her representation in the notion of the 'university city'. As a matter of fact, when I asked her about the city's social life, the forms of entertainment people usually engaged in, she replied: "Well, it is a rather quiet city. I mean, you do not find nightclubs or pubs like the ones there are in Santiago or Madrid. Students, for instance, tend to get together on the beach, and sing and drink around a fire." Tranquillity and student life, no matter to what paradoxical extent, found in her accounts a perfect fit.

I also remember her reply to a question I had asked her about the city's safety: "It is safe - that is if you do not go into the northern *poblaciones*."

My third imaginary representation of Antofagasta dates back to the days I spent in Santiago de Chile before departing for the desert. I remained in Santiago for four days, including a weekend. I spent those days with very close friends from my school days back in Spain. They were Chilean and had decided to return home on their graduation from school. We had kept in touch through various means and at the time of my arrival they had already six years of living in Santiago. They did not know Antofagasta, they had never gone further north than La Serena. But they were definitely not running short of stories about the city.

The first thing I heard from them when I told them that I was heading for Antofagasta was a startling "What for heaven's sake is taking you to *Antofagasta*?", and the way they pronounced the city's name sounded all but promising. They went on to tell me about a very ugly city, industrial, unexciting, distant, isolated. Their account was certainly not encouraging. Moreover, they told me about a relative of theirs who was actually living in the city but of whom they knew little other than rumours of his involvement in murky businesses - "for, you know, Antofagasta is a harbour town, full of people that come and go, sailors, women, bawdy nights, well, you know...".

It turn out that, during that my first stay in Santiago, I probably benefited more from what people did not tell me about Antofagasta. I did not know at the time, of course, but the way that my friends, and their friends, and I would dare say many of Santiago's inhabitants talk of their city, make use of it, appropriate it and embody it, in their gestures, vocabulary, dress codes, the way they drive their cars, complain about public transport, make a decision as to what to do on a Saturday night, in all of these and more, the *santiaguinos* are displaying, without them probably being aware of it, although not

always, the strains of the very centralised political administration to which they are subjects, with all its core-periphery implications not the least of which is its disrespect and mockery of the provinces. All that I saw and did during those four days that I spent in Santiago - and the many times I returned throughout the time of my fieldwork - provided me with a comparative, and I would add contrastive index of how urban life in Antofagasta was alternatively set up.

Before I set a foot in Antofagasta I had already an idea of the city in my head. Orderly and colonial, cosy and familiar, and yet also industrial, rowdy and peripheral. I was intrigued by the inconsistencies between some of these definitions but somehow managed to reconcile them in one encompassing image. A short lived image, for that.

4.1 Mapping the Work Fields (of Fieldwork)

I arrived for the first time at Antofagasta in March 1997. I stayed there until December 1997, working as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for Research in Anthropology of the University of Antofagasta. I returned as a doctoral student in late February 1999, and conducted fieldwork until December 1999.

Prior to my arrival in 1997, the University of Antofagasta had arranged for me to rent a room from a host family in the Gran Vía district. The district is popular amongst students for its proximity to all three city universities. For that reason, it is common practice among local families to sublet rooms to students. Subletting and rental arrangements adopt a diversity of forms: some students will rent single rooms, some will be willing to share with up to three other people; some students will look for families that offer full board, others will only be interested in the accommodation. It is not at all

unusual, therefore, to find families who are running their houses as if they were small hostels.

The price for a room is very variable. It depends on the house's location - the closer to the university the higher the rent; on whether it is single or not; whether it includes an individual toilet or this has to be shared; on who is to clean the room, the host or the tenant; on access to a telephone, washing machine, cable TV, microwave, etc. The room that the university had arranged for me was a single very spacious room with a toilet of its own. It was furnished and the landlady had agreed to clean it on a daily basis. I was allowed to receive calls on the house's telephone albeit not to make them. I could use the kitchen for breakfast but not for more elaborate cooking. The room was part of what looked like a once elegant but now worn down chalet in a middle- to high-class residential area within the Gran Vía sector.

I was only to stay there for one month, however. The place was very nice but I was soon to find out that I was paying three times more than the average student rent and, in any case, well above what I could actually afford. The rent I paid for that one month was of 120,000 pesos.⁴² True, the room had rarely before been rented by students. It was too expensive and the house was located in an area that some students would no longer refer to as Gran Vía but as Playa Blanca. The zoning and concomitant social classification of the districts adjacent to the universities is blurry and unclear. Judgements as to whether one sector is better off than another are usually made on the spot. The whole area is a comparatively well off district, of course, particularly if measured against any northern *población*. But still a hierarchy of places applies within the sector. Students had seldom therefore been attracted to that part of Gran Vía - even when it is probably not more than

⁴² In 1997 the dollar/peso exchange rate oscillated around the \$1=420 pesos mark. In 1999 it had gone up to \$1=512 pesos.

ten metres from the closest ‘student’ area. In the past, my landlady had rented the room to *ingenieros*, as she called them - engineers, either foreigners or from Santiago, called by the mining companies for a specific job. The companies would generally pay for the rent, which explains why she could afford to inflate her prices to such an extraordinary level.

Luckily, by the end of my first month in Antofagasta I met a young psychologist, who was then working at the local branch of the National Health Service but was also a part-time lecturer at the Universidad José Santos Ossa, who was looking for someone with whom to share the rent of a three-bedroom apartment in the city’s centre-north sector. I happily agreed to share the 170,000 pesos rent with him and soon afterwards moved into what was going to be my home for the following nine months. The apartment was part of a nucleated group of council estates that were developed in an attempt to ‘densify’ Antofagasta’s cityscape during the 1960s. Today, it is inhabited mainly by middle-class residents.

During my 1999 stay I decided to break my fieldwork into two six-month periods in order to change residence and thus exploit the possibility of living in what everybody in Antofagasta acknowledges as its three sectors (north, centre, south). From March to July, I rented a room in a student house in the city’s south, in an area known as the Curvo and Caliche after two massive council housing developments that were built there in the 1960s. From July to December, I shared the rent of a small apartment with a recently married couple. They were both journalists although, at the time, neither of them was really working as such. She was unemployed and remained so until one and a half months prior to my leave; he was doing small part-time jobs for various media: producing a daily early morning local radio show, curating the film collection at the

Universidad José Santos Ossa and working for free for both the Regional Ministry of Agriculture and a local cable TV station. I paid, in both cases, a rent of 75,000 pesos.

I shall now attempt to produce a brief description of each one of the three residential areas in which I lived. It is not my intention to recount their histories as housing estates but rather to recreate with some degree of accuracy their ambience, social perception and connection to the rest of the city. There were - are - very great differences between the sectors - in location, social structure, patterns in the use of space, relation to the city at large. And yet there are many similarities too. It is these that imprint Antofagasta with its characteristic distinctiveness.

Valdivia

Calle Valdivia is famous in Antofagasta for ‘lodging’ the Evaristo Montt *animita*⁴³. An *animita* is a small shrine which renders tribute to a person who died in a dramatic and sudden episode. Folklore has it that people who die such deaths are seized so brutally from life that their *anima* (soul) is left wandering endlessly around their death place. People are then known to go there and ask the *anima* for favours: to heal an ailing relative, to procure employment, to help a crumbling marriage, etc. Upon warranting a favour, the benefactor will usually go back to the *anima* and honour her by presenting a small engraved metal plaque in which tribute is paid for the *favor concedido* (conceded favour). Evaristo Montt is Antofagasta’s most respected *animita*. It is probably also one of Chile’s most famous popular religious icons. The wall to which the *animita* is host runs for well over ten metres with not one centimetre of its surface free from the metal

⁴³ Evaristo Montt was an operator of the railway company who died after the sudden explosion of a locomotive engine in 1927.

acknowledgements. The pavement is equally taken by bouquets and flowers and lighted candles and chandeliers. It is a breathtaking view.

Only once, however, did I come across somebody paying their respects to Evaristo Montt. The shrine is located at the street's northern extreme and does not really affect life in the housing estates. The *animita* is certainly a landmark, a symbol to which everybody refers (for orientation, directions, etc.), but its presence is otherwise little felt in the neighbourhood.

Calle Valdivia runs parallel to a stretch of the railway line that connects Chuquicamata to Antofagasta's harbour (the railway that fulfilled my expectations for 'authenticity'). In fact, the city's old railway station is located next to where the housing estates now lie. The symbolic importance of the railway line rests in that it effectively acts as a fourth spatial marker to the city's segmentation. The city is thus accordingly partitioned into northern, central and southern sectors, and a section west of the railway line and another one east of it. The former distribution (north, centre, south) is even acknowledged by the most important of the local newspapers, *El Mercurio de Antofagasta*, which separates property advertisements on the basis of the three-tier longitudinal classification. The paper does not itself separate real estate property on the basis of the 'railway' criterion, albeit many of the individual entries shown do employ such a standard.

Calle Valdivia lies just west of the railway line. Just for that, the rents on the housing estates along the street may well be twenty to thirty thousand pesos more expensive than those of its eastern counterparts. Valdivia is therefore often seen as the eastern limit to the city's centre. It is into Valdivia that Latorre, one of Antofagasta's founding streets and, today, most important commercial axis, unfolds as it reaches its termination. At nights, however, the upper end of Latorre street, the one that reaches Valdivia, becomes

a parade for prostitutes and the street's ambience is quickly transformed into one of relative danger and hostility. Having said that, during the day the sector is characterised by great tranquility and ease. The housing estates at Valdivia, those in which I lived, are an unusual development within the *población* at large, which is mostly characterised by one-story neo-colonial houses. Some of them are in a greatly impoverished state, generally because they go back to the city's founding period and have since not been substantially refurbished. Their decaying facades have often been painted with colourful reds and greens and blues but an attentive eye can always spot the cracks and clefts disguised by the paint.

The sector is known as the *población* Sector Estación, literally the Station Sector neighbourhood (see Figure 4). Briefly, the sector is characterised by the following: an unusually low proportion of women working at home; one of the city's most important concentrations of technically qualified labour (that is, not university educated but trained at professional institutes); a very high, by city standards, population of pensioners and generally old people; and one of the city's highest densities of rented property (IMA, 1994). (Tables 2, 3 and 4 show the figures for these and other relevant statistical indicators for each of the three *poblaciones* described as well as for Playa Blanca and René Schneider, the wealthiest and poorest neighbourhoods in Antofagasta respectively⁴⁴.) I was neighbour to, for instance, a single mother with two children who worked as a social worker for the National Health Service, a woman who worked as a freelance psychologist for the city's prison, and a recently married couple, he being a

⁴⁴ The wealthiest neighbourhood in Antofagasta is by far Jardines del Sur, an exclusive self-enclosed residential suburb in the city's extreme southern pole. For statistical purposes, however, and in what stands as a bewildering exercise, data for Jardines del Sur has been compiled along with that for Coloso, a tiny fishermen village some 5kms off the city's southern limits. Second to Jardines del Sur comes Playa Blanca, which is therefore the one I have decided to include.

self-employed graphic designer and she working as a clerical officer at the local Chamber of Commerce.

Table 2. Educational background (% of neighbourhood populations)

<i>Neighbourhood (population totals)</i>	<i>Never attended</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Professiona l Institute</i>	<i>University</i>
<i>Sector Estación (5,795)</i>	1.2	29.4	23.2	4.2	11.6
<i>Gran Vía (9,281)</i>	1.2	19.3	19.3	4.9	28.1
<i>Norte (4,008)</i>	3.3	33.1	20.9	2.4	6.0
<i>Playa Blanca (5,598)</i>	1.0	22.7	19.3	4.1	27.0
<i>René Schneider (3,799)</i>	3.4	49.7	18.5	0.8	1.2

Source: IMA 1994

During the day, the neighbourhood was a relatively quiet place. Children were at school, most adults at work, pensioners were rarely felt or seen. Within the vicinity of my housing estate, the little activity that one could find was concentrated around the four *boliches* (tiny retail stores) that surrounded our *condominio* (self-enclosed housing development).⁴⁵ This is in fact something that characterises the city as a whole. One can hardly walk one hundred metres without encountering a *boliche*, generally located on a street corner. Most sell non-perishable foods (canned tuna, canned tomato, pasta), dairy produce (cheese, milk, eggs), toilet paper, soda drinks, beer, ice creams, sweets, crisps and bread. Occasionally, some shops will also store pencils, paper and other general

⁴⁵ The very high numbers of retail stores can often be explained in terms of the credit lines that they offer their customers. There is a limit to the number of credit lines that one store can keep (given their resources and liabilities). As long as there are people whose consumption needs are being constrained by lack of credit, there will be room for further *boliches*.

stationary equipment. Bigger stores also sell fruits and vegetables. Along with the *boliches*, the other type of retail outlet one is bound to find in the vicinity of any housing development is a *botillería* (literally, bottleshop). These are alcohol licensed vending stores which generally take over the *boliches* as social meeting places when night falls. They too tend to be located on street corners.

Table 3. Wealth Indicators

<i>Neighbourhood (population totals)</i>	<i>Market Value of land (UF/m²)⁴⁶</i>	<i>Poverty (% of neighbourhood population)</i>	<i>Car Ownership (per 100 people)</i>
<i>Sector Estación (5,795)</i>	6.38	10.8	16.3
<i>Gran Vía (9,281)</i>	13	1.3	33.1
<i>Norte (4,008)</i>	4.69	22.7	11.3
<i>Playa Blanca (5,598)</i>	13	3.6	37.7
<i>René Schneider (3,799)</i>	1.6	48.7	2.2

Source: IMA 1994

The busiest times in Calle Valdivia were the afternoons, between 13:30 and 15:00, and the late evenings, between 20:30 and 23:30. At those times the street was taken over by uniformed children who would congregate around the largest *boliche* in the neighbourhood. Teenagers would usually hang around the shop talking, flirting, joking, hanging about or, in the local slang terminology, *taquillando*.⁴⁷ Smaller children, on the other hand, would appropriate a nearby side street and turn it into a football pitch, tennis court, skateboarding turf, battleground, etc. Some time around midnight, however, young

⁴⁶ A UF (*Unidad Fiscal*, fiscal unit) is a standard government valuation currency. In 1999 it stood for about 15,000 pesos.

men of between seventeen and their early thirties would have gradually taken over the corner space from the school girls and boys. The use they made of it was very different - rather than open and outward looking their appropriation was intimate and enclosed. They would not be so much observing, *taquillando*, amongst other things because the opacity of the night would not allow it, as they would be sitting down *compartiendo*, sharing a slot of time with each other: talking, of women, work, memories; glossing the day, telling stories, *copuchando* (gossiping); and drinking. This is, for example, Luis speaking, a thirty year old self-employed plumber and friend of mine at Valdivia:

You know how it is here, Alberto. There is nowhere else to go, so we sit around here [the *botillería*]. The weather is nice, it ain't cold, and is *rico* [cosy, nice] to be with friends. Plus the *botillería* is "around the corner" [laughs], so we are always well supplied [with beverages, that is]. It is good to *compartir* with friends, and it is fun, better than being at home. [At this point I remark that women do not usually accompany us in our *botillería* get-togethers...] Yeah, well, some women think it is not appropriate to drink in public, they are scared of the police coming [in Chile it is illegal to drink alcohol in public areas]. But you have hung out with us, it is not as if we drink to get drunk; we hang out together, *compartiendo*, a way of spending the night with friends.

A brief note about drinking⁴⁸. In Antofagasta, men brag of being *buenos para tomar*, good for drinking, that is, accustomed to heavy drinking. Many women also refer to Chilean men in those terms. During weekdays, the men that congregate outside a *boliche* or *botillería* to *compartir*, for it is mostly men that do so, do not generally indulge in excessive alcohol consumption. They will sit down for one or two hours and talk while they drink one or two bottles of beer. On Friday and Saturday nights, however, the men, this time perhaps accompanied by some women friends, will stay drinking, if not abusively certainly generously, up until much later, sometimes four or five in the morning. Sharing a carton of wine or a bottle of *pisco* (Chile's most popular alcoholic

⁴⁷ I shall talk about *taquillas* and the social life of streets at large in Chapter 5.

drink; it is a spirit made of grapes that some call ‘the whisky of the poor’) mixed with soda, and circulating it as they simultaneously consume time, stories and beverage, the group will thus spend their nocturnal *carrete* (hangout). These can thus be seen to be spaces of social consumption and social interaction very different from the ones that the schoolgirls and boys occupy despite occurring at exactly the same physical site. Against the joviality and juvenility of the latter, the nocturnal spaces of the young men appear bounded and closed, and even, if compounded by the reputation of certain *poblaciones*, intimidating.

The *boliches* and *botillerías* have something of Edward Hopper’s famous ‘Nighthawks’ painting. They, like the bar in Hopper’s canvas, illuminate the night, often both literally and figuratively - the light that comes from the street corner shops opening and lighting up the only spaces of sociality in many neighbourhoods across the city. Antofagasta is, in this sense, a remarkable city. It is most unusual for a neighbourhood to have a local pub, bar or a similar meeting place. In fact, only once did I come across a public house or tavern in my many walks around the city’s neighbourhoods. Other than in the city’s centre, which in this respect does not amount to more than a grid of six streets, and the *balneario municipal* (the municipal beach resort, located in Playa Blanca) that type of locale does not exist. The manner in which the city copes with this deficiency, if it should be one, and the array of alternative arrangements which it comes up with, is therefore of great importance if we are to understand how social life in Antofagasta counts on the malleability of urban space and is constructed out of its practical appropriation.

⁴⁸ I shall touch upon this issue again in Chapter 6, when analysing the celebrations accompanying *Fiestas Patrias*, the national festivities.

Gran Vía

From March to July 1999 I lived in a student apartment in Calle Nicanor Plaza in the Gran Vía neighbourhood. I shared the apartment with a nineteen year old female student of business studies at the Universidad Católica del Norte and two twenty-six year old students of journalism, male and female, both at the Universidad José Santos Ossa. They were looking for a fourth person with whom to share the rent and had posted, as is usual practice, various advertisements around the neighbourhood: on the noticeboards of the two local supermarkets and the common rooms of all three universities.

The apartment formed part of a housing estate, a *condominio*, very similar to those where I had lived two years before in Valdivia. They too were a legacy of the municipal attempts at ‘densifying’ the built environment back in the 1960s. Unlike in Valdivia, however, here the housing estate, and the neighbourhood at large, was a virtual student camp. We were unusual tenants, though, in that we held the apartment for ourselves. Most students rent rooms rather than apartments, staying, if perhaps in the company of many other students, with a host family. This has a formidable impact on the dynamics of the social structure because it brings a great number of social networks into contact - students of very different backgrounds, studying at different universities for different degrees, come together under one roof thus enabling, if with varying degrees of efficacy, a multiplicity of connections between their own separate social networks. After two years of living in Antofagasta I could almost always trace the genealogy of acquaintances of someone to whom I had just been introduced through at least one social network other than the one that enabled the meeting in the first place.

Gran Vía is one of the city’s most privileged neighbourhoods (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). It is organised around the avenue, from which it borrows its name (*gran vía* means

‘grand avenue’), that is the city’s major southern transport axis. To the north, the avenue changes name to become the elegant and modern Avenida de Brasil, which itself unfolds right into the city’s centre. To the south it leads to the housing estates and barracks of the military, the campus of the University of Antofagasta and, even further south, some 7km down the road, to the exclusive residential suburb of Jardines del Sur (see Figures 3 and 4). What everybody knows as Gran Vía proper, however, extends for about 1km, both eastwards and westwards of the avenue, between what is roughly the Avenida de Brasil and the military barracks. Although the administrative demarcation might signal the neighbourhood to be somewhat other, for all practical effects the *población* is known to start and end there where students begin and cease to take over its space.

The western flank of the avenue is only two hundred metres away from the sea line, to which it unfolds in the form of two beautiful if slightly neglected gardens that put an end to the city’s seaside promenade. The houses on this side of the avenue are all detached and semi-detached chalets, some, true, in better conditions than others, but most generally denotative of a higher than average affluence. Again, in administrative terms most of these housing developments would belong to the *población* Playa Blanca. Popularly, however, only the better-off houses, the ones closer to the sea, are called by that name, the reason being that many students will be renting rooms in houses located in the immediacy of Gran Vía. I believe that this ambiguity with which social urban space is defined and classified, despite there being a formal administrative structure to its demarcation, is significant because it highlights how different groups will present

Table 4. Miscellanea (% of neighbourhood populations)

<i>Neighbourhood (population totals)</i>	<i>Ownership of property</i>	<i>Renting</i>	<i>Full time study</i>	<i>Domestic labour</i>	<i>Pensioners</i>
<i>Sector Estación (5,795)</i>	37.3	33.5	12.9	17.6	8.4

<i>Gran Vía (9,281)</i>	41.0	34.9	20.9	16.7	7.7
<i>Norte (4,008)</i>	37.3	28.7	10.4	19.9	7.5
<i>Playa Blanca (5,598)</i>	52.9	22.3	22.5	16.1	7.6
<i>René Schneider (3,799)</i>	64.1 ⁴⁹	8.3	7.4	22.3	3.2

Source: IMA 1994

themselves as attached to one space rather than other. A friend of mine, a university lecturer at the Universidad Católica del Norte, spoke of his recently purchased house in the area as being located in Playa Blanca - and it was, according to the administrative demarcation. And yet only one street away from his house, still in Playa Blanca, someone would advertise a vacant room as being in Gran Vía, probably aware that students might otherwise be deterred from applying, presuming too high a rent. Similarly, students may sometimes rely on the vague and ill-defined neighbourhood label to hide their social and economic background from other, better-off students. The massive housing developments of the Curvo and Caliche estates, for example, which are located on the eastern periphery of the neighbourhood, are also referred as being within Gran Vía, thereby blurring the fact that some of the rents there can be up to 30,000 pesos lower than those paid for a room somewhere along the centre of the avenue.

The neighbourhood's heart is the avenue. At all times during the day one can see students moving up and down its extension, back and forth from their houses to the university and viceversa. The premises of both the Universidad José Santos Ossa and the Universidad Católica del Norte are sited along the avenue, in fact almost symbolically

⁴⁹ René Schneider is a shanty neighbourhood whose residents first settled the area on a squatter basis. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, to find a higher rate of owner-occupiers than, say, for Playa Blanca, for these are for the most part self-help houses.

opening and closing its passage, for the former is located at its northern end whilst the latter is effectively sealing its southern tract. Even the Universidad de Antofagasta, whose main campus is located further south, has its administrative offices, and until recently also the Faculty of Law, along the avenue's axis. The presence of the students bestows the area with a liveliness unlike that of any other neighbourhood with the exception of the city centre. Of great importance too is the presence of the Korlaet supermarket right in the middle of the avenue. Although I shall take up and develop the point later, I want to note here the remarkable role that supermarkets play in the organization of social life and social space in Antofagasta. Rather than standing merely as shopping centres, their position within the city's built environment is used to recast and open up new forms of sociality. They are not so much spaces of consumption as spaces where social relationships have opened up consumption to other socio-spatial possibilities.

The Korlaet supermarket in Gran Vía has become the neighbourhood's informal community centre. The store has a noticeboard which is by far the most important of the advertisement media employed by landlords and students in their respective offer of and search for vacant rooms. In the same vein, the board is also used for selling and/or buying second-hand commodities (mattresses, typewriters, furniture, books, cutlery) and to publicize all sorts of services (domestic labour, child care, psychologists, dentists, student tutors, typewriting, CV's typing and printing) for which there is likely to be a market. The store also has a fast-food kitchen where they sell roast chicken (very popular among the Antofagastinos), pizza slices and chips (particularly popular amongst the student population). Recently, another fast-food take-away locale has opened in what is one of the corners of the supermarket's building, from whom they are thus renting the space. There are no sitting places in the supermarket complex, a fact which is

understandable if we bear in mind that people are permanently moving up and down the avenue. Both fast-food locales are therefore catering to passers-by, who are for the most part students. These will sometimes sit on the supermarket's steps or on the nearby pavement to eat their treat. What is remarkable is that, because in Antofagasta intraurban buses (called *micros*) do not have their stops fixed, drivers will often stop to see if among the resting students there are any waiting for a ride. This gesture of attention towards the students vanishes as soon as we are aware that all ten bus lines operating in the city are in private hands and, therefore, in serious competition for passengers. Along Gran Vía, for instance, five bus lines operate, of which four have very similar itineraries heading in both directions along the avenue. A group of resting students stands therefore as a potential clientele for bus drivers who will purposively slow their progress, or even stop, as they pass by. It does not take much to figure out how this spontaneous dialectic between students and drivers has ended up setting a fixed stop which is today almost a norm respected by passengers and drivers alike. This has also happened elsewhere in the city, particularly at some points within the centre of town, and it can be seen to stand as a perfect example of how a particular dynamic of social relationships can 'build up' out of nowhere a spatial form which affects and modifies the rest of the urban structure. I asked Roxanna, a law student at the Universidad Católica del Norte who used to work part-time as a *promotora* (promoter) at the supermarket, to describe and explain the movement and circulation of people around the Korlaet for me:

I think it has to do with the fact that we are next to the Parque Japonés [a nearby park] and the municipal beach resort. This is one of Antofagasta's nicest areas, and it is very pleasant to walk around here. The supermarket is kind of the focus of it all: people come here to buy the press, the *polla* [lottery], they might just pop in to buy a soda drink, to check out the noticeboard, to catch the bus. Some university students will meet here to go together to class, others come to buy some fast-food that will do as their lunch. Families who cannot bother to go all the way to *Líder* will drive in for a quick replenishment shopping. There is a lot of movement and I think that that attracts people, who therefore rely on the place for meeting,

brief gossiping and the like. I, for one, often come here during exams. We arrange it so that every two or three hours we meet here and relax and chat as if we were taking a break.

Although the movement of pedestrians along the avenue is considerable at all times of the day, one cannot properly refer to the area as one of hectic activity, as would be the case, for instance, with Calle Prat. After all, Gran Vía, like the rest of Antofagasta except for the inner city, is a residential neighbourhood. Having said so, the innumerable webs of social relationships that criss-cross the neighbourhood, kept alive by students with an almost 24hr round the clock continuity, charge its ambience with a latent vitality which, if rarely visible, for there are no local pubs, or nightclubs, or cafes, is decisive in the way it shapes and defines the city's social life.

During the day, most students stay at their universities' site which, if perhaps not as such located in a proper campus setting (only the University of Antofagasta is), all have enclosed built environments. When not attending lectures they will be studying at the library, researching for a group project, or just loitering at the refectory or the union bar. Students will stay at the university because, for the great majority who is renting a room, the prospect of returning to their host family accommodation is rarely enticing. Moreover, the way most course programmes are structured in Antofagasta's universities is such that most, if not all assignments have to be produced on a group basis. This has therefore the effect of compounding the amount of time a student will spend in the company of his peers. I asked Bárbara, a twenty-three year old student of management, about the time she used to spend at the university:

I spend most of the day here. I live with my parents here in Antofagasta, so I will go back home to have lunch, but otherwise I like to hang around the campus. The university is a lively place, with people hanging out at the refectory, or the student union bar. I also like the layout of the place, I think it is very friendly: you see people lying on the grass, sometimes popping out to the beach for a break [the campus of the University of Antofagasta is only metres away from the shore]. But don't get me wrong, most of the time we meet to work, most of the groups of people that you see at the refectory are working, or studying. And yet, I don't

know, it's like very personal, like very flexible: it is a place that can be very easily accommodated to what you want out of it. Here we study, we play sport, we party, we even *pololeamos* [hang out with your boy/girl friend]. Where else in Antofagasta can you think of a place like this?

The universities are therefore extremely busy environments during term time and students will always refer to them when trying to organize their social life. In July 1999 I was approached by some teachers of the Universidad Católica del Norte for three recently graduated Spanish students were coming over to Antofagasta as part of an exchange programme run by the *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional* (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation) and they wanted me to brief them on what life in the city was like. At the time of their arrival all three universities in the city were on their winter break and therefore completely empty of students. The Spanish students were overwhelmed, almost scared, of the city's muteness and stillness during the first weeks that followed their arrival. They were understandably hesitant to explore a city that looked to them so fragmented and decaying. They voluntarily confined themselves to Gran Vía, a neighbourhood that, to their eyes, appeared relatively safe and affluent and, in any case, was next to the workplace where they had to spend most of the day. Moreover, the university had accommodated the students in a house of its own in the nebulous Gran Vía/Playa Blanca area, thus furthering their spatial confinement. I made a few attempts at persuading them to leave the neighbourhood, to come with me to *el Huascar*, the nightclub district which is located some 7km from Antofagasta's southern urban limit. I tried to show them how there was plenty of life in the city 'behind' the city, other than through the traditional spatial forms that we, in Spain, were accustomed to. I did not insist too much, though, for I knew their opinions would change the moment the students returned from their winter break. And so it was.

University students have constructed a social environment of their own that only tangentially counts with and makes formal use of the city's urban structure and form.

The moment they substantially disappear from the city, therefore, so does the spatiality they have created. The Spanish graduates' impression of city life thus changed when, on the third week of August, students made their way back to the lecture rooms after a month's vacation break. Indeed, thereafter their social lives became so busy that on one occasion, on asking one of the students if he would like to go for a coffee so he could brief me on his experience of the city thus far, jokingly but not the less truthfully for that, he told me that I would need to make an appointment so solicited he was.

What is it, then, that students do? And how do these practices reflect on urban space? Briefly stated, students spend time with each other. This is what Marcelo, an engineering fresher student, told me about his very short experience of university life:

It is a lot of work, and of a different kind to that of high school, for here most of the assignments are group-based. It is fun, though, for you end up spending a lot of time with your friends, which kind of lends the work an element of ease and leisure. I come a lot to the university for that reason, for here one finds spaces for both working and relaxing. [So you always work here, I ask...] Yes, most of the times. Well, sometimes we'll meet at somebody's place, but that usually is in the evenings, and only if we are running into a deadline, which is quite common, actually [laughs]... I am not from Antofagasta, I arrived here seven months ago, and in this time the only places I've come to know are the university campus and the Gran Vía area; I think that may give you a clear idea of my whereabouts, of whom I spend my time with and where.

Students' consumption of space-time is therefore group based and oriented, their production of space-time similarly so. They do not refer to the city when describing their spatiality but to their own networks of social relationships.

I have already mentioned how most of their work assignments for the university are produced as members of a class group. For the sake of convenience, familiarity and/or trust, and whenever possible, students always remain attached to the same group. These need not, necessarily, be made out of friendship ties, although most of them are. Of course, different groups conform to different study arrangements, depending on variables such as their numbers, their access to computer facilities, where each member lives, etc.

What unites most groups, however, at least in so far as the subject of the city's spatiality is concerned, is a tendency to end up converting their work meetings into more convivial forms of sociality. Students will meet, say, at 20:00 in the house of one of the group members. They will generally meet in the house of someone who, as we did, has the property to himself, either because he rents it along with other students or because he still lives with his parents. They will work for two, three, four hours, depending, of course, on how far ahead lies the submission date and the number of meetings they talked of holding. What is remarkable is that, however long they work for, no matter how late their study activity ends, the social dynamics of the group will gradually loosen up and give way to more spontaneous, less task-oriented forms of companionability. Someone will go out and buy one or two two-litre bottles of beer in the local *botillería* (which remain open until 03:00, 04:00, even 05:00, depending on the day of the week and the neighbourhood) and the group will thereon indulge in some sort of discussion with very little concern for the passing of time. Moreover, it is not unusual, once the meeting has metamorphosed into an opportunity for *compartir*, for someone to call in friends and fellow students who might live in the vicinity (not unlikely if that is Gran Vía). With a frequency which I must admit as a little bit too tiring for the purpose of conducting fieldwork, these informal *convivencias* (get-togethers) will often last until 04:00 or 05:00, with group members often staying over in their hosts' houses.

If one were therefore to walk around the streets of Gran Vía between 02:00 and 04:00 in the morning, he would be surprised with the number of flats and houses with their lights on, and the distant voices, giggling and cheering he would hear as a background soundtrack. He would also see groups of people - who one would presume to be students - moving up and down the neighbourhood, migrating from one house to another, to the local *botillería*, to the *cerros* (the hills that enclose the city on its eastern side), to the

beach, to the Ruinas de Huanchaca (of which I shall talk more later). The weather allowing, which, in Antofagasta, is almost all year around except for winter, one would also see people occupying the fronts of their houses and, of course, the illuminated corner spaces of those *botillerías* that were still open. The vitality of the neighbourhood is, if not manifest and, therefore, from the outside⁵⁰, slightly imperceptible, outstanding and definitely extraordinary for a residential area. The spatiality of the area is unpredictable - one cannot tell where and when people will meet - and yet constant, for people *do* meet, that is how their sociality emerges, albeit in a form which only marginally uses the social spaces that are given by the built environment and the urban structure. Students, inflecting their social practices with a spatiality that is essentially liquid and ever shifting, discreet and persistent, have transformed Gran Vía into a youth camp, even if leaving untouched its residential status.

The socio-spatial rhythms that characterise life in Gran Vía are therefore, to an extraordinary degree, determined by the academic calendar. It might thus be worth pointing out how student activities are punctuated by the calendar and how their practice affects the neighbourhood (and the city). In Chile, the academic year is divided into two semesters. Freshers' Week, known as *la Semana Mechona*, takes place during the first two to three weeks of March, at the beginning of the academic year. This is the name given to a week of celebrations wherein old students welcome their new peers to the university. The activities involve publicly embarrassing challenges, competitions and parties. It is difficult to ascertain for how long the festivities last because each individual course holds its own. There will, therefore, be a *Semana Mechona de Medicina*

⁵⁰ That is, both in spatial terms, as an observer - 'outside' the houses -, and in epistemological terms, 'in appearance'. Which helps support the contention, made at the beginning of the chapter, that one needs to be oneself a *producer* of the rhythms to see how the spatial is constructed out of, and yet in a manner irreducible to, the built environment.

(Medicine Freshers' Week) and a *Semana Mechona de Enfermería* (Nursery Freshers' Week), etc., etc. The festivities will be coordinated so that no two intrafaculty degrees will hold their welcome activities at the same time. In effect, of course, this amounts to a stretching of the allotted 'week' into two, three, sometimes even for a month, depending on the number of degrees that coordinated their activities.

Freshers' Week activities are initially held at university sites, although they soon spill over and hit the rest of the city, specially many of the neglected spaces that surround the campuses: the shore that fronts the Universidad de Antofagasta and the Ruinas de Huanchaca. If the use they are going to make of the beach, for instance, is too conspicuous, such as burning tyres for a fire, around which people will then sing, drink, tell stories or play games, then a special permit has to be obtained from the police. Yet these are rarely sought, for students know too well that they can always organize *paseos* (literally, walks, strolls, but the word is used to refer to an 'outing') to anywhere in the vast desert that surrounds them. This is in fact very much what characterises their social life during the rest of the year - an ongoing creative exercise in the expansion of their geographical imagination. Sometimes, for example, they will go for the night to La Rinconada or El Lenguado, two remote beaches that are located 16km north and 10km south of the city respectively. On other occasions, they will organize weekend trips to Juan López, a tiny beach resort 25km north of Antofagasta, or to San Pedro de Atacama, 250km away, or to any of the ghostly nitrate refineries that populate the desert's hinterland. I asked Rodrigo, a Nursery student union official, about the nature of their *paseos* and the choice of location for the activities of Freshers' Week:

Well, it depends: for the *mechonadas* [publicly embarrassing performances] we normally make people to go into town, otherwise it is simply not funny. The parties we'll have them here at the [university's] refectory, unless we have money, in which case we'll book a nightclub or a pub. Most times, however, we just organize a *paseo* to El Lenguado: we buy lots of booze and arrange for the transportation of people there. I think those are the kinds of

get-togethers that people enjoy most, for we are free to do what we want. They don't really differ that much from the sort of things that people end up doing on a normal weekend, going somewhere where you can hang about and drink without worrying about the *pacos* [police]. In my time here I have attended Freshers' parties at Juan López, Las Garumas, the refectory and El Lenguado. It has more to do with the co-ordinating than anything: it's about bringing people together. People are happy to go anywhere as long as they know that they will have fun.

Indeed, the range of alternatives and possibilities which students have fabricated is astonishing: Coloso, Punta Itata, Chacaya, Playa Amarilla, Roca Roja, La Chimba, Tupa, the city's coastal range, the flanks of the Panamerican Highway, Conchilla, Punta Cuartel; these are all unsettled spaces, unmarked, deserted, a geography of nowhere. They come-into-being, they gain existence, through their occupation by students.

The occupation of such spaces, or non-places, as Marc Augé (1995) would have them called, is not, as Rodrigo pointed out, something that happens exclusively during Freshers' Week. As a matter of fact, it is at the beginning of each semester, during Freshers' Week in autumn and the *Semanas de las Carreras* ('Course Weeks') celebrations in spring, that students happen to make most use of the social spaces provided infrastructurally by the city: nightclubs, sport grounds, the university locales, etc. These are occasions that are sanctioned by the academic calendar and for which students might even get some funding. Most student organizations will therefore strive to put on the best acts, holding and subsidising at least two or three night-long parties at any of the local nightclubs, getting famous people to host these parties, organising competitions, challenges, giving away prizes, etc.

The second semester opens with the *Semanas de las Carreras* ('Course Weeks') celebrations. These are week-long celebrations that are held by all nursing, or engineering, or architecture, etc., students. They aim at bringing faculty and students together, as well as encouraging liaisons between students from different years. They

involve activities such as conferences and roundtables, sports competitions and games, and a daily party, often taking place at a nightclub. Competitions are run between years and at the end of the week the winning year is crowned victorious. All in all, the celebrations will effectively run for the most part of the semester. With three universities together offering over sixty degrees, there is simply not one evening, from early September to late November, where one cannot find some fraction of the student population engaged in such festivities. True, most Course's Week celebrations will only attract their respective students. What is important to note, however, is that, independently of the number of students who are actually involved in any one of such activities at any point in time, the sheer cumulative wave of their celebrations effectively manages to 'map out' a geography of student practices. One can therefore speak of the production of a spatiality which, if invisible, is definitively real enough to affect the form of the urban structure. Whether through a 'non-place' or a nightclub, students are threading a geography of practices that has a socio-spatial rhythm of its own and is therefore irreducible to a standard structural or cartographical reading. For any particular group of students, for instance, the rhythm of their spatiality will depend as much on the time that their Course Week organizers decide to hold their celebrations, be it Week 1, Week 2 or Week 6 of the semester, as on the times that their best friends, if studying for a different degree, will have theirs, and, not the least, for students cannot always attend subsidised events, on the times they will receive their *mensadas* or monthly allowances from their parents. To follow up this last point, it is worth pointing out that most students tend to receive their allowances between the 7th and 10th of each month, a fact which can be traced geographically for it is immediately reflected in their practices: up goes their attendance to nightclubs and down their spatially creative *paseos*.

On July 1999 I left my apartment in Gran Vía and decided to find a new place to live somewhere on the opposite side of town. A lecturer in journalism at the Universidad Católica del Norte told me about a recently married couple, both once her students but now alumni, who were looking for a third person with whom to share a flat or house. I was introduced to them, we discussed how much we were willing to spend, agreed on a rent range, and then started to look for a new home. We used *El Mercurio* as our starting point, focusing on the ‘centre’ and ‘northern’ sections of its properties-for-rent pages. They were not willing to go too north for he had to commute on a daily basis to the centre of town for work purposes plus they were not too keen on the idea of living *en el norte*, in the north. We saw some apartments in the centre-east, that is on the eastern side of the railway line. These we could afford but their link to the rest of town was rather poorly serviced by *micros*. Although we used to start our daily search by visiting an apartment that had been advertised in *El Mercurio*, we then used to roam around the neighbourhood in question, looking for houses or flats that appeared to be empty. We would also walk into the local *boliche* or *botillería*, sometimes also into the *centro de llamados* (call centre - small, privately run telephone operator businesses), and ask if they knew of someone in the neighbourhood who was trying to rent a property. It was in a *centro de llamados* that a person overheard one of our questions and thus approached us saying that his sister had a flat to rent in the ‘centre’ of town. He offered calling immediately his sister and arrange a visit to the apartment. The apartment turned out to be not as central as he had indicated but rather in the *población Norte*, a large neighbourhood whose name (*norte* means ‘north’) is indicative of its geographical location.

The Norte neighbourhood is a large, heterogeneous district that runs parallel to the coast for almost two kilometres. How 'north' one really lives thus depends on where exactly in the neighbourhood one's home is. The neighbourhood received its name because it was the first housing estate to be populated, back at the turn of the century, beyond the railway grounds that were built next to the city's harbour. The extent of the railway's estate sealed, for many years, the urban expansion northwards of the city, and those that decided to 'jump over' the company's grounds did so at the expense of their marginalisation. The 'north', that is 'north' of the estate, thus became synonymous for marginality and poverty. Those who could afford not to go 'north' simply did not (see Figure 5).

Today, therefore, the *población* Norte is a mixed neighbourhood. It is far from being the 'northern' district it once was. As a matter of fact, in strict geographical terms, the neighbourhood could easily be labelled as central. That is why the market value of the land upon which the neighbourhood stands is relatively high (see Table 3). On the other hand, many of the housing developments in the area go back to the city's foundation period and thus stand in a terribly precarious state. This contrast of realities has been further enhanced by the arrival of the *Líder* megamarket to the area, which took over a derelict beer factory and constructed a monumental space to which it has recently been announced that a six-screen cinema complex will be added. Moreover, the Town Hall has also recently decided to move away from its centre of town location and build its new premises next to the megamarket. And a new coastal promenade, the Plaza de los Eventos, running along the northern part of the neighbourhood's littoral, was inaugurated in November 1999.

Our apartment was located in a high-rise apartment tower, one of the few high-rise buildings that can be seen to scrape the city's northern skyline. During my time there,

the apartments in the tower were mostly inhabited by low to middle class families. The recent developments, by the Town Hall and the megamarket, have benefitted the area where the tower is located, for these are relatively close to it. The neighbourhood is also known for being host to two popular markets, the *Feria Modelo* and *La Vega*, and the city's fish market. Only *La Vega*, however, being located towards the northern quarter of the neighbourhood, has retained its popular appeal (see Plates X *a* and X *b*). The fish market and the *Feria Modelo* are rapidly decaying, not the least because of the overwhelming competition they are now facing from the *Líder* megamarket, which is only some two hundred metres away. *La Vega*, on the contrary, a fresh fruit and vegetable market, is benefitting from its strategic location, which appeals to both poorer northerners and middle class southerners looking for fresh produce.

The Norte neighbourhood is a twilight zone. It has little urban coherence, a remnant of its foundation as a spontaneous appropriation of neglected land. For many years it lay in an urban limbo, not northern enough to be part of the Town Hall's concern with keeping the city together, and yet not central enough to benefit from the privileges of urban centralization. The feeling of not being part of an overarching neighbourhood, a feeling all too common in Antofagasta, is in Norte well above the norm. There are too many disparities, too many differences within the neighbourhood to facilitate the production of any sense of homogeneity. Social life tends therefore to be exceedingly inward looking: the lack of such homogeneity favouring the development and nurturing of social relationships amongst those who live close to one another.

The inward-looking nature of much of the neighbourhood's social life allowed me to appreciate the particular structuration of everyday life. In so far as people led a life relatively unconnected to the larger city, it became clear the ways in which they routinised the quotidian. With most men at work outside the neighbourhood it was the

women that spatialized the area and bestowed on it a spatio-temporal structure. In Norte, like elsewhere in the city, the day began at about 07:00 in the morning. Most schools start at 08:30, and so do the first university lectures. Students, particularly university ones, have therefore to leave home very early, for they can have a long journey to their study place. The women thus tend to stay alone at the house during the mornings, sometimes caretaking for the smaller children whose school day does not start until 15:00. They use this time to do minor replacement shopping at the local *boliche* or the *Feria Modelo* or *La Vega*, or to go to the centre to deal with some administrative matter, such as paying in a cheque at the bank, paying the water, electricity, gas or telephone bills, claim a social aid payment, etc. (Paying in person and in cash, as opposed, for instance, to a standing order, allows people to play with their monthly budgets, sometimes, if short of money, deferring payment even if at risk of disconnection, of the electricity supply or telephone line, for instance.) When women have some business to attend at the city centre they tend to go there late. This is for two main reasons: on the one hand, because shops do not open until around 10.00 and it is only later still, at around 12.00, that the streets' buzzy atmosphere will provide the populated environment that women are looking for to walk around with their children; on the other hand, women dedicate the early part of the morning to their domestic labour, cleaning the house, preparing lunch, doing minor shopping, etc.

Going to the centre of town is not, however, something that the women of Norte do very often. They will, of course, whenever the need to do so arises, such as the instances already mentioned. But otherwise the centre of Antofagasta is generally only seen as the place where one goes on a Saturday evening stroll. Women, therefore, and I am here always talking of women who do not work, or do so at/from home, spend a great deal of their time within the *población*. The temporal and spatial framework with which they

think the city is ‘built out’ of the social sphere provided by their *poblaciones* and, still more parochial, their homes. It is their everyday life at home that determines what their use of the city will be - the city is spatialized as the reversal, a copy in negative, of the house. In this vein, for instance, on asking her about the way her week was structured, a neighbouring woman told me:

Well, from Mondays to Thursdays nothing much really goes on: we stay at home, working, cooking, watching the *novelas*; on Fridays we do our laundry [they pile up their laundry to save water and electricity consumption], on Saturdays *vamos al centro* (we go to the centre) and on Sundays to *Las Pulgas* [a popular market in the city’s north].

The centrality of the house in social life is reflected also in the way it is referred in language use, preceded always by an article, *la casa*, as in *ven a la casa*, ‘come to the house’ (which would stand for ‘come home’). In Spain, for instance, such language use is seen as irregular because the noun would always be preceded by a preposition, never an article (*ven a casa*). The use of the article heightens and singles out ‘the house’ by claiming the appropriation of a generic type and thus marking it as a central element in the organization of social life (see also the remarks made in Chapter 1 about ‘the house’ as the central organizer of the built environment).

There are three more elements around which the centrality of the house gains its significance⁵¹. The first, of course, is women’s labour. Women work at home *and* from home. In Antofagasta many women work in small cooperatives, such as in the production of sweets and pastries. These they will later sell in the street, or to local *boliches*, *tahonas* (bakeries), newspaper kiosks or even major wholesalers. Other women work as hairdressers, either at home or visiting around the *población*. There are also

⁵¹ The argument presented here echoes Roberto DaMatta’s thesis on the ‘house’ and the ‘street’ as the spatial domains (and social categories) where Brazilian social life is played out and enacted (DaMatta, 1985).

those who use their kitchens as small-scale fast-food points. They will prepare and sell *completos* (hot dogs), *papas mayo* (chips with mayonnaise), hamburgers, *empanadas* (meat pastries), *empanaditas de queso* (cheese pastries), generally doing most of their business at night, catering for those who return from a weekend nightclub outing or to those that hang around the streets of the *población* until well into the night. Whatever their labour, it is in any case very likely that this will be circumscribed by their homes or, at most, by their *población*.

The second element that works to reinforce the central place of the house in the spatialization of the city is television⁵², particularly the *novelas* or soap operas. These are shown at two times, between 14:30 and 16:30, the first slot, and between 20:00 and 21:00, the second slot. Remarkably, the first slot is generally left for foreign productions, be they Brazilian, Colombian, Venezuelan or Mexican. One can also see repeats of old Chilean *novelas* at these times. The second slot, on the contrary, is regarded as the prime-time for Chilean television and is as a rule used to broadcast national productions. There is a further repeat on Sundays, when an edited summary of the week's programs is shown. The *novelas* can become, and generally do so, nation-wide events, with each hourly episode convoking audiences of millions. They appeal to both the lower and higher income groups and, in 1999 at least, their content is overtly ideological, playing with the theme of Chileanness and attempting a (re)construction of Chilean identity along the lines of both popular and mythical images (the ideal-type 'communitas' of the *huasos*, Chile's southern rural farmers and peasants, in '*Aquelarre*' ; the popular ingenuity and slang language of downtown urbanites in '*Cerro Alegre*'; the folkloric and exotic candour of the Chiloe islanders in '*La Fiera*'). Many people condemn, when

asked, the pervasiveness of television and its erosion of primordial social relationships. In June 1999, for instance, I was invited by the Director of Social Work at the *Dirección de Desarrollo Comunal* (DIDECO, Communal Development Service), a municipal institution, to a workshop on “Communication and Interpersonal Relationships” that had been organized by DIDECO for the women of Norte. Well over one hundred women had been invited, belonging to the seventeen *Centros de Madres* (Mother Centres) that operated in the vicinity and surrounding neighbourhoods. A catering service had been contracted, as well as a disc jockey, whose job was to create a relaxed, amenable atmosphere. The workshop had been arranged for 15:00. Only at 16:20, by the time the first slot of soap operas was over, some women started to drop in. In the end, only ten women attended.

The truth, however, is that rather than wearing down any particular form of social relationships, the ubiquity of television has produced new social arrangements and liaisons. In Norte, for instance, a large number of the neighbourhood’s children would often meet in the house of one of them, whose parents owned one of the biggest TV sets within the *población*, to watch *Lunáticos*, a late night and rather rude program. Their mothers would in turn gather in the owner’s kitchen to talk and gossip until well into the night whilst they would keep an eye on their children and the contents of the program. As an expression of modernity, television in Chile is therefore, in the same line as Daniel Miller has argued for Trinidad (1994), a contradictory cultural form. In fact, the one theme that the ten attendants to the DIDECO workshop kept bringing forth as a discussion topic was the issue of their troubles, doubts and fears over *cómo ser madres*, how to be a mother. When one’s resources are as scant as those of some of these

⁵² It has been reported that the TV set in a high-class household is switched on for an average of 7 hours per day, whereas this figure rises to 13hrs/day for the lower income groups (Jocelyn-Holt Leterlier 1998:

families, keeping the TV set switched on for thirteen hours a day can be seen as morally approbatory if, in doing so, one manages to keep one's children away from the dangers of street marginality. It is no longer, therefore, a matter of simply watching television but of making a decision as to what to see and what not to see, how to see it, whom to see it with, how to incorporate it, what meanings to bestow it with. As Mary Douglas has argued in a different context, the rationality of consumption (here, watching television) does not simply relate to an underlying good that is desired for its own sake; rather, it implicates and extends to a whole array of social relationships. The choices that consumers and, more generally, individuals face, is not between kinds of goods but about what kind of society they want to live in (Douglas, 1996).

Much time is therefore spent watching the afternoon and evening *novelas*, more often than not performing some other task at the same time (see below for some examples from the Ladies' Societies). The evening soap opera is, of all television events, a conspicuously social occasion. It generally takes place within the framework of our third element in the structural triad of the domestic: the evening meal or *tesito*.

Tesito, a diminutive for *té*, tea, is the word Chileans employ to refer to their evening meal. It is in fact not so much a proper meal as a very light dinner, more like a snack. It is also called *once* (literally, eleven) which I believe it has its most faithful English translation (idiomatic, not cultural) in the notion of 'elevenses'. (I was told by a Jesuit father, albeit I have been unable to confirm it, that the word *once* comes from the custom, on the part of certain nuns in Chile, to accompany their evening snack with *aguardiente* (an extremely strong alcoholic drink), and who, to avoid embarrassment by referring to the beverage by its name, instead referred to it by the number of letters of which the word is composed, eleven, *once*.) It generally consists of toasted bread with

cheese or ham or *manjar* (a sweet, toffee-like milk spread) and tea or coffee. Sometimes the leftovers from lunch are brought in. I can hardly recall an occasion when we did not have, or the hosts to whose house I had been invited did not have, some friends or guests invited over for *tesito*. The relative frugality of the meal speaks of its social dimension: it is an occasion for *compartir* in which the emphasis of what is being shared is placed on the person rather than the food (indeed, that is the meaning that the verb takes: one does not share (*compartir*) things but other people's company and their mere presence; its most literal translation would thus be 'to be together'). During *tesito*, people will talk, gossip, joke and discuss the latest developments in the arguments of the *novelas*. If one lives locally, it is not uncommon for the conversation to go on until well into the night, sometimes up to one or two in the morning. Those who do not live locally might leave a little earlier, if only because it is extremely difficult to find a taxi or *colectivo* (taxis with a fixed itinerary that are shared by a maximum of four people at different points throughout its route) anywhere in Antofagasta after midnight (*micros* no longer operate after that time except for weekends).

That the evening meal is a fundamental social occasion can be better appreciated if we situate its description within the broader structure of the quotidian. Antofagasta is criss-crossed by hundreds of social networks. Many of these are led and run by women - the so-called *Sociedades de Damas*, Ladies' Societies (eg. *Comité de Damas del Club de Yates de Antofagasta*, Antofagasta's Yacht Club Ladies' Committee; *Damas de Verde de la Corporación Nacional del Cáncer*, The Ladies in Green of the National Corporation for Cancer; *Sociedad de Damas del Centro Español*, The Ladies' Society of the Spanish Centre). Not all are as formal an association as their name would suggest. Most, in fact, are very familiar, if not familial, affairs. And there are yet others whose activities are not subdued to a corporate structure. The Greek and Chinese Cultural Collectivities, for

example, despite being amongst the most important of the city's *colonias*, are essentially familial affairs run by women. (On asking a member of the Greek Community who *headed* the corporation, she replied "we are five women, related by kinship ties". Her answer by-passed my question, concentrating instead on whose activities kept alive the community on an everyday basis - the corporation, I found out later, was headed by a man.) The women will get together with their children and teach them traditional cooking recipes, or they will organize and prepare the dancing shows for the annual *Festival de las Colonias* or other similar ethnic and national festivals. The meetings will be informal, spontaneous, more fun-oriented than task-oriented. Eventually, the evening will terminate with everyone having *tesito*, watching the *novela*, talking, discussing details about the costumes the group should wear to the festival, about the food to prepare, about anything, really, for these are strongly related kin groups. These get-togethers are replicated daily in different guises and formations all over the city. They are generally convened to coincide, in their closure, with the evening meal, serving thus to punctuate the essentially social motif of the occasion. There is very little of an utilitarian or functional disposition in the reasons and ways in which people come together to have *tesito* or to watch the evening soap opera. For our concerns here, these are social relationships whose aim is to 'cope' with the city, to produce a spatiality that refers the home to the rest of the urban structure and therefore somehow 'domesticates' the city. As the site where women work, congregate to watch the *novelas* and/or invite each other to dinner, the house has become the major organizer of social life in Antofagasta and, therefore, through its relation to the rest of the urban structure, a structuring pillar of the city's spatiality.

By way of a concluding remark to this description of the avalanche of evening get-togethers that shapes 'the flow of spaces and the space of flows' (to borrow a phrase

from Manuel Castells (1996a, 1996b) that he coined to refer to the new spatiality of the informational society and which I, nevertheless, also find very apt to define the very untechnological forms of socialisation that occur in Antofagasta), that is, the forms of spatiality and the processes of spatialization that take place in the city and shape it, I will cite a comment that was made to me by a nationally reputed scholar who, at the time of fieldwork in 1999, was rector of a very prestigious local school but had only arrived to the city to take over the post nine months before:

There is so much in this city that is remarkable - don't you think so? It is truly a mining encampment, that is socially, with its social structure and all - a *Ciudad de los Rumores* (Gossip City). This, I do not know how to call it, this obsession to get together, to have *tesito*, to *compartir*, be it in an *asado* or a school board meeting, whatever. See for instance our school board: we do not elect our members, no, these are co-opted, asked to join in, invited. People spend so much time in each other's company, there are so many social events that brings them together, that being on the board is not seen as an obligation, no, on the contrary, it is just another social event, another occasion to *compartir*.

* * *

So far in this chapter I have attempted to map out the socio-spatial rhythms of the neighbourhoods I lived in whilst conducting fieldwork in Antofagasta. With the notable exception of the student activities derived from their virtual appropriation of the Gran Vía district, that which has been described for one *población*, say, Norte, can be validly apply also to the other neighbourhoods (here, Sector Estación and Gran Vía). Indeed, it can be extended to the city at large. The opening up of *boliches* and *botillerías* as spaces of urban social relationships; the structuration of the quotidian around the house and its *población*; the nucleation of the *población's* space around the rhythms imposed by the social activities of women: their working commitments, their liking of soap operas, their involvement in wider social networks that converge on an almost daily basis in the celebration of an evening event, punctuated by the ritual of *compartir* whilst enjoying

tesito together; these are the key socio-spatial rhythms that, whilst forming and building up within the *población*, eventually overspill and affect the way the rest of the urban structure is envisaged and used.

We have therefore seen why the house and the *población* (the ‘domestic’) in Antofagasta are so much more than a spatial unit; why they act as a fundamental element of the city’s social system and how their position in the temporal and spatial structure of the quotidian determine the city’s spatiality as a secretion of their workings - space, rather than a setting, is a rhythm, a process whose dynamics are fed back into the social system of which itself forms part. The production and deployment of the rhythms can therefore be seen to map out a city which only marginally resembles its holistic characterisation as a ‘mining encampment’ or a ‘harbour-city’. And it is under that rhythmic cartography that one can make sense and explain the apparently contradictory images of the city as ‘orderly and colonial, cosy and familiar, and yet also industrial, rowdy and peripheral’ (see p. 6 above).

I will not conclude this chapter. Instead, I will try to summarise the key ethnographic developments presented so far by way of an introduction to what constitutes the subject of the next two chapters: how the practice of space can delude us into its apprehension as a given category (into ‘fixed’ space). And I will do this by means of a very short case study.

I have already made reference to Mary Douglas’ idea of how social relationships are not in reality referred to underlying specificities, be they goods, ideas or values, but to social opportunity costs, decision-making processes about the *kind of society* we wish to live in. I believe this applies too to the ways we use and shape our social spaces, our spatiality. Making a decision as to being *here now* involves too an appreciation of the other places we could be at and the other things we could be doing. Which is why the

evolution of any social relationship is just as much about its own intrinsic momentum and development as about the social possibilities that confront it. And which is why by incorporating the notion of spatiality into our understanding of social relationships we are suddenly opening ‘change’ to a new dimension of possibilities. With this in mind, I will now move on to the case study; a study of the ways that university students in Antofagasta have creatively crystallised space as a choice of social relationships.

4.3 ‘Nighthawking’ in Ruinas de Huanchaca

The Ruinas de Huanchaca are the monumental ruins of a silver melting plant that operated in Antofagasta between 1892 and 1902. I already made reference to them in Chapter 2 when describing the “saltpetre nostalgias” and their ‘place’ in the politics of identity.

The ruins lie some 200 metres south of the Universidad Católica del Norte and are therefore formally part of the Playa Blanca neighbourhood. Along the southern built perimeter of the neighbourhood, in what is the closest set of houses to the ruins, stands a tiny *botillería* which students call *El Boliviano* (The Bolivian). The shop is known all over Antofagasta for being a very cheap alcohol store, for its long opening hours, which during weekends can go up to 05:00 in the morning, and for being a meeting point for students prior to their departure to a party, to the ruins or to other ‘non-places’. The proximity of *El Boliviano* to the Ruinas has allowed students to talk of the latter not as a site but as an activity: when students say *vamos a las Ruinas* (let’s go to the Ruinas) what they are actually saying is ‘tonight we hang out at the ruins’. Las Ruinas is a *carrete*, a night outing, of which the frequent walks to *El Boliviano* to replenish the beverage stocks are but a part.

During weekend nights, the terraces of the ruins are appropriated by university students who, in groups of varying size, extend themselves along the wind-protected walls of the Ruinas. They will arrive there between 01:00 and 03:00, although these are, of course, only approximate times. Some students will make of the ruins, as I have already pointed out, their nocturnal outing. Others will go there after a previous activity: a friend's birthday somewhere in Gran Vía, an *asado*, a university party (these must always be over by 02:30).

It is probably after a university party that the ruins see their most massive occupations (during weekdays, when no extraordinary activities are being held, eg. Freshers' Week, university parties, etc., the occupation of the ruins will oscillate between 20 to 50 people). On such occasions, hundreds of students will arrive at the site, previous stop at *El Boliviano*, with guitars, dope, and litres of beer and other alcoholic beverages. In Chile, public consumption of alcoholic drinks is forbidden by law, not to mention that of drugs. The appropriation of the ruins is therefore an overt challenge to authority. But it is also, and because of that, a discursive position on what the youth believe they can and cannot do. They are at once reclaiming a space to be young and a way of being young. Their actions are far from hidden: everybody in Antofagasta knows what goes on in the Ruinas during weekend nights; and they both consent to and, tacitly, approve of it. I asked Choche (C) and Marcos (M), two good friends of mine, university students of marine biology and frequent users of the ruins, about the *carretes* there:

C: I think the Ruinas are the best. There is no place quite like them elsewhere in Antofagasta; I would say there is no place like them in the world.

M: Yes: it's like being somewhere else, in a place of your own making. I think people like to go there because it feels as if you were creating your own space, a space of the group, of the youth. You look around and see the place full of students, *compartiendo* [sharing], telling stories, playing guitar, singing. It's brilliant, it's kind of spiritual.

C: I think it has to do with the fact that it is such a beautiful place, and yet it stands in such an appalling condition, you know, nobody [referring to the local authorities] caring about it. I think students are somehow acknowledging that. We go there because it's beautiful to look

out to the sea from its terraces, because it's a clean and pure night that wraps us there; I don't know, because it's like having the desert to oneself: it's like being in the desert and yet being in the city, it's like being in control of everything.

Furthermore, on occasions the *pacos* (policemen) arrive at the ruins in patrol cars. From the distance they will illuminate, with powerful beacons, the night-enwrapped students; they are, in effect, exposing and denouncing them as they exercise their authority. But that is as far as they will go. For the students, in an improvised chorus of thundering cheering, will reassert their right to be there, to remain doing what they are doing, and will drive the police away. Theirs is, effectively, a spatial manifesto, a political stance on their spatial marginality in urban programmes. They are showing their discontent with the spaces that Antofagasta can officially offer them. They are thus reconstituting the city by producing new spaces and new times; they are defining themselves as urban political actors, invested of a novel, different and positive spatio-temporal structure. Their spatiality is shifting, mercurial; it is liquid, in perpetual (re)structuration of new spaces. Today it was the Ruinas. But tomorrow it will be the beach, or the desert, or the hills that overshadow the city. For their spatial practices are a political statement, a reclamation - not of place, but of identity. And what a better way of doing it than through their appropriation of a neglected National Heritage monument.

What is also remarkable about this appropriation by students of the Ruinas is that, in time, their activities have proved to be pioneering in their recuperation for the city of what for many years had been an abandoned place. It was the students' use of the ruins that taught the authorities how the monument could be fruitfully incorporated into the urban structure. Today, the Ruinas are being used for all sorts of municipal fêtes and other outdoor celebrations, of which the "saltpetre nostalgias" are but one example. Perhaps the most notorious of such celebrations is the annual Christmas concert, when the ruins are converted into a fluorescent stage upon which the Symphonic Orchestra of

Antofagasta performs a popular repertoire, ranging from the ‘Star Wars’ theme to the ‘Blue Danube’. Here, the audience (in 1999, 5000 people⁵³), like the students, is also exposed, albeit this time it is a colourful fountain of fireworks that effects the illumination.

⁵³ *El Mercurio de Antofagasta*, 18 December 1999

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RITUALS OF SPACE (I)

Chapters 5 and 6 form a unitary whole and are written to complement each other. I have split the ethnographic material upon which the chapters are built because I believe each part to have an internal coherence that will be better appreciated if related to yet distinguished from its sibling part. A conclusion for both parts is at the end of Chapter 6.

In Chapter 5 I will deal with what I shall generically label 'structural' urban life, meaning the social life of those spaces that play a permanent part in the organization of everyday life in Antofagasta. These are: Calle Prat, the local equivalent to a high street; the *Líder* supermarket, which for practical purposes and want of a better word may be described as the local 'mall'; the Avenida del Brasil, a high class residential avenue which, because of the children's playground which its gardens boast, becomes overflowing with families from all over the city during weekend afternoons; and the *Feria de las Pulgas* (The Flea Market), a street market that takes place on weekends in a northern neighbourhood. I shall introduce the ethnography, however, by way of a brief analysis of the social life of streets. Street life, in Antofagasta, provides a window to the social organization of daily life (the practice of the quotidian, as it is sometimes called today), as well as an insight into the classificatory means through which this is done. In many important respects, the street epitomizes the desert, the wilderness, that which is uncivilized and pre-modern. Urban life in Antofagasta could therefore be described as a crusade against the street, or as the struggle for its ideological transformation. The ideas and concepts that are used to work out a great number of the city's spaces are derived from the primary taxonomy that is provided by the socialization of streets.

Chapter 6, on the other hand, will examine the spatial practices that take place in a number of one-off situations; annual happenings which, despite the diversity of their motives, appear to mobilize the Antofagastinos in a similar fashion: the *Fiestas Patrias*, which celebrate Chile's independence from Spain; the *Fiesta de las Colonias*, an annual festival held by the Antofagastinos to celebrate the ethnic and national diversity of the city's population; All Saints' Day on November 1st.

Altogether I aim at showing how there is a stable structure to the enaction of spatial rituals. There are a number of actors whose engagement with space sanctions the rituality of their practices: women, children and students. It is the choreography of their practices that produces a ritualised geography. The ritual of space-making, I contend, has an underlying structure to it. Most remarkably, however, that structure is *practical*, it consists of movement; that which is embodied in the doings of women, children and students. For that reason, space is political, for it is the *preferences* of such actors that give it life as a social dimension. In this vein, before giving way to the ethnographic material, I would like to recapitulate and underscore an idea by Mary Douglas to which I made passing reference in the previous chapter: that of social actions being decision-making processes and, therefore, social opportunity costs.⁵⁴ "Any choosing 'for'", she has written, "is also a choosing 'against'" (1996: xiv). In reviewing the 'structural' spaces whose descriptions I shall shortly afford, we ought to bear Douglas' remark in mind. Our traditional perception of space as a geographical container (looking *through* space rather than *for* it) has blinded us to that to which it is structurally related: the 'agains' of the spatial events that are actually being produced. As Roberto DaMatta would put it, however obvious it might sound, a house is a 'house' *because* there is a

‘street’ which it is not (DaMatta, 1985). To better understand the place - and my use of this word here is deliberate - that ‘structural spaces’ have in the (re)production of everyday life, we need therefore to ‘situate’ these against the backdrop of their non-occurrences, that is, of the rhythmic spaces that are the fabric of quotidian social life and were described in the previous chapter.

5.1 The Social Life of Streets

Regard for streets in Antofagasta is generally low. Women, for instance, are seldom seen walking alone, except, perhaps, in the centre of town and at working hours. To the question of who can be seen occupying the city’s streets and what social characteristics define them, people’s replies hardly vary from one another: the streets are used and occupied by groups of *antisociales* (antisocials), of *pandillas* (juvenile groups), of *taquillas* (more of them later); that is, by groups of delinquents, drugaddicts and loafers, more often than not youths. Those who do not frequent the streets do not do so because they are, as an informant said, “responsible, with things to do, duties to attend; good students, for example”. The notions of responsibility and duty are widely associated to ‘home’ and ‘family’ ideals: “The teenagers that find in their dedication to study an obligation, guided by their parents, that is by responsible parents, those teenagers tend to belong to homes that are soundly constituted” (Flores et. al. 1995: 91).

In the characterisation of streets a good many people place a lot of emphasis on their state of cleanliness: streets are dusty and dirty, sometimes, but not always, because they are not paved. (This is an issue of great concern for the local authorities for it is a

⁵⁴ Alfred Gell (1992) has recently argued for the incorporation of the idea of opportunity costs (currently in common usage only among economists) into anthropology, specifically in relation to the objective study

recurrent theme in people's explanations of why they do not feel there is an 'identity' to the city. The Town Hall went as far as launching an advertising campaign that read: *Su Ciudad no es Suciedad*, Your Town is not the same as Dirt, a word game that played on the phonetic similarity between the capitalised words.) The connection between street pollution and danger is a step that many informants made: "I do not think the streets of Antofagasta are particularly agreeable; most are dirty, without trees, and populated by *gente quebrada* ('broken people', meaning without integrity, sinister)."⁵⁵ The association is followed up and expanded into what could grossly be glossed as an opposition between nature (here the dusty wilderness of the desert) and culture (expressed in the shape of urban forms but also as 'vegetation' or 'green', i.e. that which proclaims the domestication of the desert). The key word here is *sano*, healthful. It is pleasant to walk around an urban environment that is *sano*, with trees, green areas and vegetation. In Antofagasta, however, other than downtown, it is difficult to find such areas. People talk of the streets that make up the city centre, for instance, as "agreeable, with green areas, street shows, etc.", or "clean, pretty and tranquil"; this is an environment where the youth meet *sanamente*, healthfully, harmlessly, unlike the streets of the *poblaciones*, where "there are few examples to be found of a healthful youth: drugaddicts, alcoholics, and there is a notable lack of pleasant places" (Cf. Flores et. al. 1995). There are many instances in fact in which the symbolism of the term expands to the degree of forming a polythetic category (Needham, 1975). In this sense, a string of very strong symbolic associations has been produced between that which is *sano*, healthful, and that which is modern (for a general discussion of the ideology of the modern in Antofagasta, see Chapter 2). In regard to the arrival of a six-screen cinema complex in the city, for

of the allocational possibilities of space-time resources (see Chapter 3 for more details).

example, *El Mercurio de Antofagasta* wrote: "... it has been hard for the Antofagastinos to cope with the fact that the so-called World's Mining Capital could [up until the arrival of the new complex] only boast old, uncomfortable and *unhealthful* cinemas..." (26 November 1999: 12; my emphasis). The Corporation Pro Antofagasta, a non-governmental organization run by some of the city's most prominent empresarios, whose general slogan reads "To make of Antofagasta a better city", traditionally runs two annual campaigns, amongst a number of others, whose mottos are: "Clean Beach, Happy Summer" and "A Clean Antofagasta: a Task for All", and a third one that is concerned with the reforestation of the city. We can see, therefore, how dirt, health and vegetation come together in the very powerful idiom of modernity and the good city. In this vein, in 1996 forty women got together to form Antofagasta's Garden Club, whose general aim was to *embellecer*, to make beautiful, the city. Moreover, the local authorities' plans for urban redevelopment similarly speak of *hermosear* (enhance the beauty of) the city. This is everywhere to be done through the incorporation of *áreas verdes*, green areas, to the urban layout (see Chapter 2 for an indication of how this is actually spelt out in the Town Hall's new plan of urban development). In the context of all such references, it is slightly surprising to find that the city's most exclusive residential neighbourhood is called *Jardines del Sur* (Gardens of the South); or, for that matter, that a new development in the much marginalised (read dusty and poor) urban north is heralded by the name of *Jardines del Norte* (Gardens of the North). Not less remarkable is to find that the road to (modern) Santiago leaves from the city's south and goes by the name of *Carretera Panamericana* (PanAmerican Highway). The road to the desert, on the other hand, leaves from the city's northern neighbourhoods and is called *Camino a Calama*

⁵⁵ There is an echo here of Mary Douglas' (1966) seminal analysis of the relationship between the concepts of purity (and, therefore, pollution) and danger.

(the path to Calama). The modern city, the punch line to all such discourses seems to read, is a green, healthful environment - the garden is to the urban as *sano* is to modernity.

The social life of streets in Antofagasta is repeatedly characterised as a domain for the expression and activities of the youth and this is, in the best of cases, defined by the idioms of healthfulness, cleanliness and tranquillity (in the worst and majority of cases it is defined by a lack of them). The most important (and representative) of the social activities of the youth is to get together in groups. This is noted by the superabundance of terms that teenagers use to designate the form and types of gatherings of their pairs: *pandillas*, *patoteros*, *paltones*, *malandrines*, *punks*, *trashers* (these two are neologisms from English), *taquillas*. The first four are pejorative terms, used to describe the activities of those that loaf in and around the streets of the *poblaciones*; the last three have fewer negative connotations, at least insofar as they designate a form of coming together that is constitutive of an (group) identity, even if this identity is somehow opposed to the social environment that surrounds it. I shall focus now on the last term of all, *taquilla*, for it is probably one of the most important of all social institutions in Antofagasta, as well the primary form of street occupation practised by youths.

In Spanish, the word *taquilla* means 'box office'. A friend defined the term as "that which makes it at the box office", implying that which is successful and, by extension, the person who is widely talked about. Another informant defined it thus: "*Taquilla* is that which is in vogue, very, very fashionable, to the extent that some may find it insulting if you call them so because they associate it with frivolity." She then went on to describe the main traits of the institution:

I can tell you that there are two types of *taquillas*: "*taquillas*" and *taquillas*. These are both groups of teenagers, 15-18. You could roughly group them as belonging to the high and low social classes. The low class tend to wear flashy trainers, they hang about in mixed groups, talking loudly, showing off, they are *pungas* or ordinary people; they go to places where there

are lots of people; they study at state schools or they do not study at all. They meet at the Caracol [an old and very small shopping centre sited in Calle Prat] or the Central Market. High class *taquillas* dress in sporty clothes, with jeans and trainers, but these are cloth trainers. They also meet in mixed groups, sometimes in pairs. They can be seen in Calle Prat. The idea is to be in a place that is ‘top’.⁵⁶

Most outside descriptions of the institution, as the above cited remarks show, tend to highlight those aspects that have to do with ‘being seen’: wearing trendy clothes, talking loudly, in sum, trying to attract attention. A local slang term, *pintamonear* (literally, to ‘draw monkeys’, meaning: to behave like a monkey, ostentatiously), depicts nicely what the institution, to an outside observer, would be all about. It is also very significant that all accounts define *taquillar* in express relation to the centre of town, specifically Calle Prat. Similar activities elsewhere are not called by this term. Nor are the group activities of people of other ages (in Calle Prat or elsewhere). The social and spatial implication of the terms is therefore mutual, in that if people only talk about *taquillar* in relation to Calle Prat, the latter is, in turn, most frequently characterised as the place where teenagers hang about in groups. I shall turn next to the description of Calle Prat and its ambiguous spatiality as both a landscape of consumption and a social meeting place. It is in the context of Calle Prat that I shall then resume the analysis of *taquillar*.

5.2 Calle Prat: A Spatial Place

⁵⁶ I am aware of the very powerful distinction that my informant made between ‘classes’ of *taquillas*. Unfortunately, I cannot afford here a detailed examination of the system of social classification through which class and status positions are ascribed in Antofagasta. Suffice it to say that Chilean society is in many respects a highly structured society with a very elaborate symbolic apparatus that is centred around the key element of class. This system can be traced back to the nature of the oligarchy that ran the country during the colonial period and for the most part of the post-colonial era, and that was reinstated in 1973 with the advent of the military dictatorship.

The centre of Antofagasta, that area of the city referred to by people when talking of going *al centro* (to the centre), can be neatly circumscribed as a grid of six streets: on a plane parallel to the coast, from west to east: Latorre, Matta and José Santos Ossa; perpendicular to them, from north to south: Sucre, Prat and Maipú. The area is, without doubt, the city's central business and commercial district. It functions as a formidable centripetal force that structures and organizes the city's physical and lived spaces. Up to ninety percent of all public (Regional Government, Tax Office, Civil Registry, Town Hall, etc.) and private (banks, lawyers, financial advisors, telecommunications companies, water, gas and electricity companies) services are based here (Gubbins, 1999c). And if one were to pin down this spatial force to just one artery that would be, unquestionably, Calle Prat.

From its birth in Plaza Colón, the city's central square, to its effective demise in Calle José Santos Ossa (and I say effective for the street actually continues for about some further six hundred metres), Calle Prat runs for approximately two hundred metres. Notwithstanding the brevity of its extension this is Antofagasta's most important social space. From a strictly commercial point of view the street is also home to the most important national retail chains: along its two hundred metres lie four clothing chainstores, three chains of pharmacies, three photo shop chains, two shoe chains and two large department stores. In addition, the street also lodges the *Caracol* and a similar 'mall-ish' locale that was, at the time of fieldwork, unoccupied. There are other outlets that are local in ownership. Amongst these stand out what people call *los chinos* (the Chinese, after the owners' ethnic origin), three general household goods and clothes stores that represent something of a mixture between a market stall and a shop. They are well known for selling at greatly discounted prices. Also local are two stationery stores.

Finally, there are two cafes, sometimes called *de las piernas* (Legs' Cafes), after the miniskirts and seductive long legs that its waitresses exhibit.

What I believe of importance here is the way in which the production of the retail environment that is Calle Prat contrasts with the concomitant generation of an overarching spatiality for the street as a whole, a spatiality that supports itself on, but cannot be reduced to, the landscape of mass consumption. On the contrary, what I shall argue below is that, against the spatiality of infrastructural permanence and iconic transcendence on which the landscape of retailing supports itself, the spatiality of Calle Prat is built out of the search for novelty and transience (a search that, as will be shown, and notwithstanding the apparent paradox, can itself be constituent of an overarching transcendence).⁵⁷

Many people in Antofagasta refer to Calle Prat by the alternative name of *Paseo Prat* (Prat Walk). The alternative denomination is manifestly indicative of the social uses to which the street is often put. Indeed, if there was one trait that characterized the street amongst all others that would be its appropriation as a promenade. Calle Prat is unquestionably the city's favourite spot for a Saturday's evening family stroll. The results of a spatial survey conducted during fieldwork showed Calle Prat to be the only spatial token to be consistently associated with *el centro*.⁵⁸ When people speak of going

⁵⁷ An analysis of the experience of 'transcendence' and 'transience' in a modern, contemporary society (Trinidad) can be found in Miller (1994). I shall hereafter use the concepts myself to describe the various ways in which different social actors use space to shape their own modes of sociality. In this respect I should note that I have not found as clear cut a distinction between one mode of sociality and the other as Miller did in his own study.

⁵⁸ With the help of some students at the School of Architecture of the Universidad Católica del Norte, I conducted a number of spatial surveys - that is, involving the sketching of a shorthand map - of the city. A blank map with only four indices (Plaza Colón, the harbour, the eastern hills and a north-south compass) was handed out and people were asked to complete it by filling it with those urban spaces that first came to mind. In every case - some two hundred and fifty -, some graphic indication of *el centro* was made. The

to the centre of town, as was the case of the woman referred to in Chapter 4, who spoke of the place in relation to her weekend family excursions, there is almost always an implicit reference to Calle Prat. This is very much how Alicia used to talk about the centre of town and the street. I was introduced to Alicia and her family by a common friend and social worker that had once helped them out with some red tape. Alicia, who worked from home in the production of sweets, lived in one of Antofagasta's most northern neighbourhoods. She was a mother of three children, of four, seven and ten years of age. They used to visit Calle Prat every Saturday. I accompanied them on a number of their trips to *el centro* and once asked Alicia what she thought of those trips, why they made them to Calle Prat and not elsewhere and how often did she actually buy things at any of the street's shops. This is what she told me:

I go with the kids to Calle Prat *de paseo* [for a stroll]; we *vitrineamos* [window browse] and walk around *el centro*. I do like to look at the shops but I never shop. Sometimes I do get something for the kids at *los Chinos* ['the Chinese', the local retail shops I spoke of before], shirts or socks, but that's it. They like to stop and watch the 'human sculptures' and the 'rappers'. Because I do not come very often to *el centro* I may pop into *las Brisas* [a supermarket] or the *Korlaet* [another supermarket] or the Central Market to buy something, but never too much because it is difficult after to board a *micro* carrying many bags. The kids also come with me to *Líder* when I have to do a bulk shopping. I like to have them with me and I just feel it is better that we all come to *el centro* and Calle Prat than for them to hang around the streets of the *población*. I feel safe with the kids in Prat.

With respect to the everyday use that the Antofagastinos make of the street this can be divided into two categories: there is, on the one hand, a minority of people that go to the

picture of the centre of town that most students held (6 to 16yrs old) was generally articulated by some kind or another of a shopping token (eg. Ripley, Líder, Korlaet, the Central Market). Whether through a spatial token (students) or the actual geographical representation of the streets (adult respondents), *el centro* was in all cases visualized as containing, at least, Calle Prat and Calle José Santos Ossa. The south of the city was commonly represented by references to the municipal beach resort and the campuses of some or all of the three local universities. The north of the city had no single, dominant spatial referent through which it was pictured. Moreover, it was often, particularly amongst the youngest of respondents, left entirely un-indexed.

street for utilitarian reasons, to shop or window browse; and then there are those that will simply hang about the street, *taquillando*, or strolling around as part, for instance, of a family's evening or weekend outing to the city centre. The latter, of course, may also be involved in some window browsing, or even shopping, but this is usually motivated by recreational rather than consumption purposes (as the case of Alicia exemplifies). I shall illustrate this by resuming here the analysis of the institution of *taquillar* in order to show the extent to which its playing out is supported on, and yet not completely explained by, the commercial setting provided by the street.

The heavy reliance on elements of fashion and design on which we saw the institution to develop, and the intrinsic connection of *taquillar* to Calle Prat, would, perhaps, lead us to believe that the social construction of the institution is supported on the landscape and iconicity of consumption. After all, Calle Prat *is* Antofagasta's most important retail environment *and* social space. Going back to the issue about street life, pollution and danger that was commented upon in the last section, it could prove correct to say that the healthful environment that was claimed by many as necessary to improve the social life of streets would now be adequately served by the landscape of consumption. That seems indeed to be the opinion of the local authorities who, in 1997, took a first step in that direction when they closed the street to all traffic in order to enhance the retail dimension of the area as a pedestrian environment. Moreover, it is this line of reasoning that has recently led the Committee for the Renewal of Antofagasta's Urban Core to make a specific programmatic recommendation towards "enhancing the role of the Old City [that is, Calle Prat and its surroundings] as an *Open Mall*" (Comisión de Renovación, 1999: 8; my emphasis). These are, of course, political interventions whose base and foundation is essentially economic. What I find interesting, however, is the

ideological veil in which they are clothed.⁵⁹ It is the landscape of consumption that is presented as a healthful environment: an environment for pedestrians, say, a family, that is clean (from dust and dirt), that is 'green' (with palm trees), that is surveilled and circumscribed and, therefore, safe. This may help explain why the practices of the *taquilleros*, if perhaps not wholly approved of (the outdoors activities of teenagers rarely are; almost every adult would ideally have them at home, studying, studying and studying) are nonetheless not condemned and equated to other, less benign forms of street occupation. The point I am seeking to make here is that there are at least two levels at which the spatiality of Calle Prat is constructed. There is, first, an ideological production of its environment, what Setha Low (1996) has called the 'social production of space'. This is here represented by the above cited economic and political discourse. Such a process of meaning-investment, however, need not coincide with the process of its phenomenological (experiential) or 'social construction'. It is undoubtedly true that it is in the interest of the city's most important economic agents to fix the symbolic landscape of Calle Prat as a retail/healthful environment. Against such an interpretation, however, the questions that must be posed, are: Can space be unilaterally reduced to a numbered set of symbolic parameters? Can the meaning of space be congealed?

These are questions that can only be answered by turning to the people that use Calle Prat, here the *taquilleros*. What do the *taquilleros* themselves relate to? That is, how do they construct the spatiality of their own presence? These turned out to be tricky questions because when it came to interview teenagers I found out that whilst most were happy to talk about *taquillar* as an institution, few thought of themselves as *taquilleros*. I decided to shortcircuit these limitations by asking them what was about the street life of

⁵⁹ This theme is developed in Chapter 2, where I talked about the ideological production of the notion of modernity.

Calle Prat that they felt attracted to. The answers given were overwhelmingly similar. To put it simply, what young people like about Calle Prat is the range of cultural activities that take place there. Very few of my respondents made a specific connection between hanging about Calle Prat and the latter's shops and commerce. What makes the street attractive is:

I don't know, everything, I guess: *El chico de las conchas* [The Sea Shells' Boy: a small and relatively old man that has the strange and remarkable ability of playing music by clapping, with his hands and knees and head, a set of shells], the 'human sculptures', the Andean musicians [groups of Andean folklore music], the clowns, the *tunas* and *estudiantinas* [bands of university singing students], *el Silvio* [a blind guitarist that imitates Cuban singer songwriter Silvio Rodríguez]...

For outside observers *taquillar* may be about showing off. For the people that are involved in the activity, however, to be in Calle Prat is to participate of a culture of possibilities, to stand in front of a social space that never repeats itself, that is always changing: "What I like about Calle Prat is that you never know what you can find there. You know that it is there but you do not know what is it that will make it up today." As a social institution, therefore, *taquillar* symbolizes the cohesion and temporality of a group whose sheer presence manages to create a space that transcends the flow of people, goods and time which defines the encompassing environment. An informant expressly described the street as "the place where anything can happen, anything can be found" (see Plates V *a* and V *b*). For this is indeed what defines Calle Prat. The number of uses to which the street was put during my two-year stay in Antofagasta is simply too great to attempt a recount. To give a general impression, the street has been used: as a hockey ground for an exhibit of the YMCA's retired women faction; as an electoral scenario for the campaign meetings of both presidential candidates during the 1999 run up for the elections; as a 'hall' for the exhibit of Town Hall plans and projects; as a concert arena and urban theatre (I am thinking here of a popular concert that Antofagasta's Symphonic

Orchestra gave on occasion of the 1999 *Fiestas Patrias* celebrations, as well as a number of theatrical representations that have been, at different times, set up in the middle of the street by both professional and amateur groups); as a setting for holding folklore festivals (dance, music, dress); as a dancing floor, used by the various *Sociedades Religiosas* (Religious Societies) in their very expressive, corporeal and sonorous rendering of homage to the *Inmaculada Concepción* on December 8; as the *primus inter pares* setting for political mobilizations and activism.

The street is also, of course, appropriated by street traders, musicians and artists: painters, mimes, ‘human sculptures’, rap dance groups, etc. Various national charities have set up stalls along the street which they use to sell postcards or simple craft in order to raise funding and advertise the organization’s work. In a similar vein, the street has been massively taken over by the merchandising stalls of most national mobile telecommunications companies, of the city’s two department stores (both trying to promote the convenience of obtaining the establishments’ credit cards), of insurance companies, etc. The street is also home to two city institutions: an open-air ‘chess school’ (which consists of no more than two tables and four chess boards around which the same people gather round one day after another) and the above cited *el chico de las conchas*. The social space of Calle Prat, the space that the *taquillas* relate to, can therefore only be defined as a space that is always changing, that is always coming-into-being.

It is not just the *taquillas*, though, who construct the spatiality of the street as a liminal dimension.⁶⁰ Although the term *taquillar*, as I said before, is never used to refer

⁶⁰ My use of the term ‘liminal’ is closer to Victor Turner’s than to Arnold Van Gennep’s. I use it to denote a structural condition of ‘coming-into-being’. As Turner himself put it: “Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure *possibility* whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may

to the practice of hanging about of adults, the truth is that these, specifically middle-aged males, are commonly seen in large groups floating about the street. There is one spot, at the western 'social end' of the street, that acts as an important gravitation point towards which many of these groups tend (see Plate VI). A friend of mine once remarked, in relation to the way that her older brother, now a retired man, used to spend his day, that it was very easy to locate him for he had his '*oficina*' ('office') in Prat/Matta, the aforementioned spot. During 1999, because of the severity with which the so-called Asian financial crisis hit Chile, the place could be seen occupied by large groups of unemployed men. At one point, their congregation there became so conspicuous that the National Employment Office decided to install a stall in the corner to encourage those unemployed to register with the office. I asked some of these men why they had chosen that part of the street for their meetings. A typical response was:

I like it here. We all come here. It is easy to meet people here: you come, sit down and talk. We talk about work - these are hard times, you know -, about pay, about the government. Sometimes somebody will come with news about employment opportunities somewhere. We talk and joke and laugh. It is nice to be here, with all these people around, coming and going, moving about. I am not a womaniser but this is also a good place to look at people and women.

Although the continuous presence of the men in the street might suggest that they have managed to carve out a fixed social space of their own, the truth is that their permanence there can only be fully understood if placed in relation to the encompassing environment. The condition of their spatiality transcends the spatial flow of that which surrounds them (goods, people and time) precisely because there is a social flow to which they can oppose themselves. The group's cohesion is enhanced *because* it is

arise" (Turner, 1967: 97; my emphasis). Liminality, as I see it, may therefore be regarded as a conceptual antecedent to Bourdieu's *habitus*: a generative and structuring principle of collective strategies and social practices which is used to reproduce existing structures.

embedded in a social scenario defined by a condition of ephemerality. The same applies to the *taquillar* of students. It is, in this sense, significant, that their choice of position for the practice of *taquillar* takes place in the terraces of the *Caracol* building (see Plate IV). The elevation of the terraces provides here not only a social distantiation from the fluidity of the street but a physical one too. Perhaps a similar argument could be applied to the social refuge of the groups of male adults, whose choice of site - the 'social death' of the street - might equally be determined by a desire to distantiate themselves from the street's social transience. Which may explain why not one of my informants made any reference at all to the landscape of consumption that is a major feature of the street.

The relation that the groups of *taquilleros* and adult men have with Calle Prat is not, however, exclusive to them. It can easily be expanded to other groups of street users: families, couples, individual people. I have already mentioned the case of Alicia and her children. Mauricio, one of my most self-conscious informants, a thirty-two year old young man whom I first met when he worked as a bank clerk but whom became unemployed half way through my second period of fieldwork, in 1999, summed up for me the traits that characterized Calle Prat:

Things happen here, that is why people come to Calle Prat. You want to buy a pair of shoes, you come to Calle Prat; you want to buy yourself some new jeans, you come to Calle Prat; you want to walk about with your girlfriend, you come to Calle Prat. You want to take your kids out, you come to Calle Prat. You do not know what to do but you do not want to stay at home, you come to Calle Prat. Here things happen around you, so you do not have to worry about making things happen. People sing for you and dance for you and play music for you; they try to make you laugh and they try to sell you things. There is no such other place in Antofagasta... This street is all there is to Antofagasta: who we are, what do we do, whom do we do it with.

Calle Prat is, in sum, a world of space(s), where, as Mauricio said, "things happen", where nothing is given and the city opens up to new worlds of social possibilities that

may satisfy shoppers, couples, families and “those who do not know what to do but... do not want to stay at home.”

Retailers, on the other hand, seem to be aware that what attracts people to the street is the very fact of not being certain as to what they will encounter there; that is, the culture of possibilities and, therefore, open-ended temporality of the street. This is shown in the incorporation of transience to the very act of selling that is physically represented in the merchandising stalls. But it is also exhibited in the uses to which *Ripley's* management⁶¹ have decided to put the store's dining hall: as an art gallery, where local artists can display their productions; and as a live music venue, where, again, young local musicians are invited to play and entertain the customers of the in-house fast-food restaurants. The most conspicuous of such representations, perhaps, was the show organized by *Tricot*, another national retail chain, for the unveiling of the shop's front façade, which had undergone a process of refurbishment. The show involved a dancing act by two couples of mannequins, well known in the city for being *los cubanos* (the Cubans) whom had not long ago been hired as a seasonal special act by one of Antofagasta's most important nightclubs. The dancers performed from within the store's display windows and were very effective in congregating a great mass of public, thus symbolically incorporating the materiality of the building into the open spatiality of the street. The building's interior, retail landscape was thus transformed into an exterior, open event.

Against the phenomenological dichotomy (space vs. place) that pervaded geographical analyses of space in the 1970s (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977), or the more recent anthropological studies of landscape, that focus on the processual character of

spatial formations (Hirsch, 1994), I believe that the presentation of Calle Prat as a place whose essence is defined by a culture of possibilities, that is, by a practice of space that is a '*practice* of transcendence' (even if in transience), allows to formally describe the street as a 'spatial place' and therefore to supersede the place-space dichotomy in favour of a category defined by an ontology of becomings (Grosz, 1999) - space as agency or, as Doreen Massey has put it, "spatiality... as an essential part of that process of 'the continuous creation of novelty'" (Massey, 1999: 274). It is my intention now to show how these traits are conserved in what is considered by many as the primary landscape of modernity: the retail environment of the shopping centre.

5.3 Shopping Centres and the Centrality of Shopping

There is only one shopping centre in Antofagasta. This is located in the city's high street, in Calle Prat. Nobody, however, refers to the building by the widespread Chilean neologism, *mol*, a phonetic translation of the American 'mall'⁶². Instead, the building is named after its architectural form, *el Caracol*, the Snail, "those strange architectural solutions of the Middle Ages of Consumption", as Marco Antonio de la Parra has called them (De la Parra, 1997: 142). The Snails were the Chilean harbingers of the malls, back in the 1970s. They are five-storey buildings constructed in the form of a spiralling ascending promenade on whose sides lie the shops. In Santiago, the arrival of bigger and

⁶¹ Ripley is the name of a national department store chain. In Antofagasta, the store only opened its doors in September 1999 and it did so with the inauguration of the greatest and most spectacular of all its national stores.

⁶² Some intellectuals, like De la Parra (1997) or Moulán (1997), respect the English spelling of the word in their writings. As for my informants, they all thought of the word in its Spanish phonetic variant, a usage which applies too in other cases, such as in *wiken* (weekend) or *peyfon* (payphone). Even the national press surrenders to such usages.

more spectacular shopping centres, the ‘malls’ that gave birth to the neologism, outmoded the *caracoles*, relegating them to “museums of small things, its boutiques replaced by hairdressers, antique shops ... technical repair services, shops selling religious articles” (De la Parra, 1997: 142). In Antofagasta, however, where no proper malls have yet been built, De la Parra’s description does not entirely apply, although it is true, for instance, that the building’s basement is all rented out to hairdressers. The rest of the shopping centre consists of some eight fashion clothes shops, three jewellery shops, two music stores and an ice-cream coffee-shop. There is also a small computer shop and an Andean indigenous craft shop.

Despite its privileged location, very few people shop in the *Caracol* these days. The shops there are all too expensive and have very little to offer. Today, the building is visited mainly by groups of teenagers, who will stroll up and down the spiralling promenade *vitrineando* (window shopping or browsing). With the exception of the basement, all of the building’s storeys have a small terrace that faces Calle Prat and that is a favourite spot amongst teenagers for the performance of *taquillar*. Although as a verb the word is not, in principle, place-constrained in its use - Tomás Moulian talks, for instance, of being typical of mall culture in Chile (1997: 111) - in Antofagasta, as I have already pointed out, I only heard people talking of *taquillar* when referring to the activities of youth in Calle Prat. True to facts, however, only recently, with the arrival of the *Líder* megamarket, has the city seen the opening of a comparable recreational space. Until then only *el centro* (the centre of town, always spoken of in such terms), of which Calle Prat is its heart, offered an organized recreational alternative to the sphere of the domestic. Only *el centro* offered therefore a suitable spatial structure where to *taquillar*. (I should add here that even if I only heard the term to be spontaneously used in relation to the groups of students in Calle Prat, my informants did acknowledge similar practices

around *botillerías*, *boliches*, supermarkets and parks, to amount to essentially the same and, therefore, to fit too the *taquillar* label.)

As a social institution, we have seen that the practice of *taquillar* exhibits certain ambivalences. It is almost always thought of taking place around shopping areas (Calle Prat, *Líder*, *botillerías* and *boliches*), but it rarely, if ever, involves any shopping activity itself. It is an activity associated with young people and yet its sole actuation sanctions and ‘puts in place’ a set of urban spaces which henceforth become symbols of the city and indices of a consumption-led adult population. Through *taquillar* the materiality of the built environment is appropriated to produce new sets of spaces, emergent and novel forms of sociality. The *Líder* supermarket will serve as an example of what I mean here.

El Líder

With little more than a year’s presence in Antofagasta, *el Líder* has already become an urban symbol and a fundamental spatial referent of Antofagasta. It was built in what used to be a derelict beer factory in the north-western perimeter of the city’s centre, a fifteen minute walk away from Calle Prat and Plaza Colón. The centre was constructed as a four-storey building, two of which are used as underground car parks. The ground floor houses the supermarket, an immensely spacious premise with 60 cashiers, a bakery, fish market, meat market, and different sections for foods, clothes, toys, books, music, electrical (microwaves, televisions, refrigerators, etc.) and do-it-yourself equipment. The upper floor lodges a specialised home depot shopping centre and a dining hall consisting of four fast-food locales and an open sit-down terrace. At the time of leaving the field, the upper floor was being expanded and room was being made for the incorporation of some retail shops. *El Mercurio de Antofagasta* had also reported about the possible

construction, within the supermarket's space, of a six-screen cinema. The entire centre has a surface area of 12,500 m².

Despite its size and the range of services offered, the centre is never referred to as a mall. It is, at best, a hybrid between a supermarket and an *agora* or public square; remarkably, the best descriptor might be that used by the company itself, the 'megamarket' label. The centre could be suitably referred to as the paradigmatic local supermarket. Its built structure has made room and incorporated all the spatial possibilities that were manifested in the appropriation by the Antofagastinos of the city's other supermarkets. Why *Lider* best exemplifies the spatial role that supermarkets play in Antofagasta I shall turn to explain now.

There are ten supermarkets in Antofagasta of which only one is located in the city's north. Of the rest, five are located in the city's centre - a grid of no more than six streets - , three in the south (one of them being the Gran Vía supermarket spoken of in Chapter 4) and one, *el Lider*, which is sited just outside the city centre. All but four are owned by a local family, the Korlaet chain of which I spoke in Chapter 2 in relation to the issue of cultural identity. The Korlaet-owned centres are in effect split into two brands: Korlaet and Eco markets. Of all supermarkets *Lider* is by far the most economical and the one offering the greatest variety of products and merchandise. The rest compete with each other on almost indistinguishable terms. What distinguishes one supermarket from another is not, therefore, the price-quality equation, which holds equal for all centres, but the array of alternative services which they come up with and offer their customers. Amongst the city-centre supermarkets, for example, there is a continuous effort to rearrange the circulation of people and, therefore, the area's spatiality, around each one of the centres. This is probably most conspicuous in Calle José Santos Ossa where the Korlaet chain has two establishments, a Korlaet and an Eco, facing each other on

opposite sides of the street. Moreover, the street also lodges the city's Central Market, which is located no more than twenty metres away from the supermarkets. The area is therefore one of feverish activity, with the street's sidewalks taken over by street traders and a constant stream of people moving into and out of the markets and hanging about the street stalls, which sell anything from alarm clocks to socks, from vegetables and fruit to nuts, from newspapers and magazines to toys. The constant movement of people has made the area an unofficial stop for both *micros* and *colectivos*, with *all* city transport operators including that stretch of the street in their itineraries. Given that what is known as the centre of town can be effectively squeezed down to the aforementioned six-street grid, the area has become *the* public transportation stop in the whole of Antofagasta. The confluence of all public transportation systems to that point has, in turn, enhanced the area's prominence as a centre of gravity. As such, the area is now also the city's most important meeting point of school children in the times immediately after school closure, that is at 13:30 and 18:30. It is from this point that children board the buses that will take them home. It is here, also, that many parents will meet their children after school, and also here that peddlers selling ice-creams, chocolate bars, nuts and sweets will come to try to do business. Not less important in this production of space and articulation of spatiality is the fact that bus drivers will not always allow school children into the *micros*. In Antofagasta, students, school and university alike, are issued a special travelcard that allows them to travel for almost a third of the ordinary ticket price. When it comes to infant students, however, most bus drivers will not even charge that price and will allow them to travel for free. This is not the case, however, around peak hours, for it is then that, by filling the buses with adult passengers, drivers make most of their daily turnovers. Students are often forced, therefore, to wait at the bus stop until the affluence of adult passengers declines, which is something that occurs gradually

as retail shops and businesses close for lunch. This is how a fourteen-year old student described her experience of the bus stop:

It is fun to be here. We all come here after class, and talk and *copuchamos* (gossip) while we wait for the micros. Sometimes is boring too, specially if I really want to get home and nobody [referring to the bus drivers] will take me on. But it is fun to be with friends and to look at all the people that pass-by, although many times we do not even take notice of who comes by, so busy are we talking amongst ourselves.

A close friend of mine, remembering her not too long ago days at the bus stop, remarked:

Why do people get together at the *paradero* [bus stop, albeit the verb which is declined, *parar* (stop), in Chile is also used to refer to the act of standing up]? Well, I don't know, because it is a *paradero*, I guess; I mean, because it is there that the *micros* stop... [I remark that the buses stop at various other points in the centre of town, to which she replies:...]. I guess you are right, yes, but Ossa [that is, Calle José Santos Ossa] is special; the Central Market is there, and the stalls, and then there is all this people, moving up and down the street, into the Market, into *Korlaet*, it is nice to see people moving all about when one is standing still. Actually, I think that the reason why I used to go there, other than to get on the bus, of course, was because I was eager to talk with my friends about what had happened in class, about the homework that might have been set; yes, I guess it is just cosy and nice to be with friends.

Children, it so seems, enjoy being at the centre of a world that is always changing, whose periphery is shifting at all times (buses coming and going, people moving up and down the street) but whose core, that is themselves as a group of friends, is stable and permanent. Their presence and hanging about the area, waiting for a *micro* that will agree to take them on board, talking amongst themselves, looking at passers-by, buying and sharing sweets, is to a great extent, therefore, what characterises the area's spatiality. In fact, when people were asked to produce a visual representation of the centre of town, the student's *paradero* figured prominently (see footnote 5). There presence is also, in very important ways, connected and bounded to the Korlaet and Eco supermarkets, even if the children are not themselves major customers. There is a direct, immediate

relationship between the built environment of the Korlaet and Eco supermarkets and the middle ground of Calle Ossa that the students occupy and reappropriate. The Korlaet supermarket, for instance, could even be said to ‘talk’ directly to the students, for it often uses its façade, located opposite the *paradero* to hang advertising slogans, and employs powerful sound systems to broadcast musical publicity.

In a more general way, supermarkets have become idioms for the expression of children’s spatiality and can be said to stand as the urban symbols which objectify (in Daniel Miller’s (1987: 19-82) sense) the place that children occupy in the social life of the city. This association has been taken up and reinforced by the supermarkets themselves. The Korlaet chain, for example, has run various advertising campaigns targeted specifically at school children: “*Mochileando con Korlaet*” (Backpacking with Korlaet; the emphasis refers to the possibility of getting to know Chile through backpacking), “*Kumpleaños en Korlaet*” (Your Birthday with Korlaet; again, the slogan incorporates a word game by mis-spelling *cumpleaños*), “*Alien en Korlaet*” (An Alien in Korlaet; another word game: the pronunciation of ‘alien’, in Spanish, resembles that of *alguien*, somebody. Korlaet was here advertising a lottery amongst customers the winning prize of which consisted of a fully paid trip to Roswell, the US military camp where aliens presumably first made contact with the Earth). A more philanthropic and less commercial campaign, “*Pintando la Ciudad*” (Painting the City), consists of the annual sponsoring of the painting of selected city-centre murals by groups of students from local schools.

It is clear that both the content and the media used by Korlaet in their advertising campaigns (the ‘Alien in Korlaet’ radio ad, for example, was broadcasted as a rap song) are attempting the identification with and capturing of a specifically young market. The latest Korlaet supermarket to be constructed, located in Avenida del Brasil, made

specific architectural provisions towards the needs of their presumed infant clientele (or the clientele derived from their association with children). At the time of construction, in 1997, the supermarket was the biggest ever to be constructed in Antofagasta. It was a very spacious locale next to the city's most recent and dazzling high-rise apartment towers. The building of the supermarket spun-off the creation of a very small retailing environment in the immediate surroundings: a chemist, a bookshop, a computer dealer and a boutique. Occasionally, the front of the supermarket is occupied too by a string of five or six stalls selling indigenous craft. The overall shopping environment, however, amounts in reality to little more than a very small retailing arcade circumscribing the centre's car park, a quadrangle with no more than thirty parking spaces. Korlaet has nevertheless managed to prevent the representation of the place as a 'fixed' space of known (and reduced) dimensions. With great imagination they have put up a space which somehow has managed to camouflage the physical limitations of the environment. Inside the supermarket, for example, one can find a cafeteria which is used by shoppers and non-shoppers alike. There are also two very tiny shops: a lottery administration and a music shop. The entrance corridor is also occupied by merchandising stalls, used, in the main, by mobile telecommunication companies to promote their latest products. During weekends, the parking space is used to set up children's games and other attractions. Most common of all are gigantic plastic castles which children colonise with difficulty and laughter, if only because they enjoy so much failing in their conquering enterprises and falling back onto the inflated cushions; net walls which they climb nimbly all the way to the top again to indulge in a happy free-fall back to the spongy cushions; mountaineering exercises, conducted under the supervision of employed monitors, where children are seen fast-sliding along a special rope that hangs between two distant and high poles. Despite the strictly limited size of the centre, the *Korlaet del*

Parque, as it is known, became a huge success and an almost compulsory destination in any family's weekend stroll. People were attracted to the shifting spatiality of the centre, to its elusive configuration as a 'fixed' space, a place whose traits are known to be immutable and therefore taken for granted. The types of games that were set up changed every weekend, and so did the competitions organized and the prizes that were handed out. The kinds of companies promoting their products by means of a merchandising stall also changed and with them the variety of promotional material that they handed out to children for free: t-shirts, cinema tickets, discount vouchers for purchasing a different range of products (cd's, computer games, soda drinks, toys). In fact, the scale of the success was such that in 1998, when the Town Hall discussed where to site a set of children's playground games that it had bought, a decision was made to locate these in Avenida del Brasil, just opposite the supermarket.

It is these mercurial traits that *Líder* incorporated and objectified spatially when it began to operate in 1998. And it is this objectification of the geographical identification that supermarkets have with children that has made *Líder* the paradigmatic supermarket of which I spoke above. Perhaps the supermarket's most remarkable feature is its spaciousness, the amplitude of its corridors, its height, in sum, its overall capacious dimensions. One's first impression on entering the locale is that of too much unused space, of some kind of mismanagement in the organization and distribution of the interior infrastructure. Yet one is also left to wonder whether, given the scale of the investment, US\$56 million, that architectural sense of hollowness might not be a design decision, a deliberate incorporation. A random visit to *Líder* on any weekday's evening confirms this last impression.

The sense of hollowness that shapes *Líder's* space has infused the place with a feeling of plasticity, of open-ended possibilities, of an 'anything-can-happen', 'anything-can-be-

found' culture. (This is, of course, what we saw defined Calle Prat's spatiality.) One of my closest friends in the field, a journalist and part-time university lecturer (and these, despite their stylish job descriptions, are not well paid employments; herself and her husband may therefore be adequately classed as belonging to the struggling medium-class that is the city's most representative social group), and mother of two, described the supermarket to me on the very first day of my second stay in the city:

It is so big, Alberto. It stocks literally anything that you can think of. I am sure we can find some Spanish delicatessen food for you there. Of course, its presence has changed everything now. So many people shop there now. It is so cheap, and there are so many nice things on display. I can literally spend ages walking around the place, browsing through every stack of produce just for the fun of it. That is why Juan [her husband] is not too keen about accompanying me on my shopping trips.

My friend was attracted to *Líder* not because - or not solely because - she knew that the supermarket stocked whatever she was looking for, but because she knew that the supermarket kept in store things she had no real need for and, therefore, given no thought to. She went to the supermarket not in search of goods but in search of possibilities. Said somewhat differently, she looked for possibilities - not just utilitarian satisfaction - in the goods.⁶³ It is in this sense that the spatiality of *Líder* is paradigmatic, defined by a structure of becomings (possibilities) rather than of known and given events. It is this structure, therefore, that the supermarket's landscape gives form to. The supermarket's entrance corridor, an impressive one hundred and twenty metres long and ten metres wide open passage, could easily be labeled as Antofagasta's second high street after Calle Prat. There is, in fact, little in the latter that cannot be found in the

⁶³ I believe this to be specially the case given the economic recession that Chile was undergoing (a consequence of the so-called 1998-9 Asian crisis) during my time at the field. Few of my informants had the means to transform their browsing into actual consumption. Their hanging about the supermarket could

former. The corridor is taken over by the merchandising stalls of most mobile telecommunication operators and that of the local cable TV supplier; there are 'street' (supermarket?) musicians; stalls promoting all kind of goods: from soda drinks and detergents to alcoholic beverages and sausages; there is the stall of a bookshop specialising in encyclopaedias; *El Hogar de Cristo* (Christ's Home), a national religious charity, has another stall of its own in which the nature of its work in the region is explained with the aid of photographs and statistics; there is a traditional pop-corn vending machine; the corridor is continually attended by taxi drivers, offering their services to shoppers; and *promotoras* (promoters), beautiful young women (many of them university students) dressed in provocative suits, great numbers of them, with at least two, sometimes four or five, per stall. There is, in sum, an entire array of services whose presence in the centre cannot be taken for granted for it is their own ephemerality - embodied in the physicality of the stalls, in the beauty of the *promotoras*, whose individual exoticness clearly opposes the transcendence of the family unit, even in the 'promotional' nature itself of the services or goods on offer - that constitutes a great degree of their appeal for customers: people keep going to *Lider* on the basis that they are never certain of what they are going to encounter there, on what or who will remain from their previous visit.

Besides the spaciousness of the corridors, the other area within *Lider* that best objectifies the shifting spatiality of the centre (i.e. its structure of possibilities) is the dining hall. This is an area approximately 500m² located in the building's first floor. It is normally used, as its name suggests, as a dining hall, where people can sit down and enjoy the food purchased from any of the premises' fast-food locales. On Sunday

only erroneously be labeled as 'consumerism'. Their visits to the supermarkets are therefore, I think, a clear indication that consumer goods are 'good to think' and not just 'good to eat'.

mornings, however, the area is cleared of tables and chairs and a small scenario is set up against one of the hall's walls. The casual theatre mounted is then used to put together a children's spectacle, of which the *Cachureos*' (a children's TV show played by giant puppets) parties are the most attended and the most emblematic. Families from all over the city will attend these events, often making of their visit an entire day's outing. The events are animated by young people, often university students themselves, who invite children to participate in karaoke singing and all sorts of different games. Prizes are handed out and many children are seen being photographed by their parents next to any of the giant *Cachureos*. The visit will inevitably always involve a lunch at any of the fast-food locales and a general, aimless stroll around the centre.

During the Christmas celebrations of 1999, the dining hall was entirely refurbished and redecorated with safari motifs. The amount of work put into the decorations was such that, despite the halls' reduced dimensions, the place greatly resembled a jungle theme park. Similar refurbishments have taken place for the celebrations accompanying the *Fiestas Patrias* (Independence Week Celebrations), when the hall was adorned with the colours of the national flag (blue, red and white) and fake *ramadas* (huge palm tree leaves used for building the popular stalls of the same name that serve traditional Chilean food and drink during the celebrations), and the commemoration of Antofagasta's Day on February 14, when similar ornamental reconfigurations took place.⁶⁴ There seems to be, therefore, a deliberate attempt, on the part of *Líder's* management, to prevent the 'fixation' of the supermarket's space, a manifest strategy at keeping alive the possibilities of its spatiality, of avoiding a *reductio ad stasis*.

⁶⁴ In the light of what was said before regarding the elements (vegetation, a healthful, safe and familial environment, etc.) through which the ideological production of the space of Calle Prat was effected, it is scarcely coincidental that *Líder's* management choice of motifs for redecorating the supermarket draws upon exactly the same range of themes (*ramadas*, safari motifs).

The idea that the megamarket is not just a shopping centre but a place where social relationships are played out as structural possibilities is well illustrated by a simple account of the people that visit *Líder*, their visiting frequency and the practices and uses to which they put its environment. At all times during the day, albeit more prominently after 18:00, the entrance corridor and dining hall of the supermarket are occupied by children of between 12 and 17. Although I did not hear of people referring to the hanging about of these children as *taquillar* (as I said before, I only heard the word used in relation to Calle Prat), their practices did not, formally, distinguish themselves from those conducted in the vicinity of the *Caracol*. Many of these youths are inhabitants of *Norte*, the local neighbourhood. Children who used to play in the neighbourhood's streets, around *boliches* and *botillerías*, are now seen running about the centre's corridors. In the same vein, many teenager groups have transferred their habitual afternoon and evening loitering to the non-commercial areas of the supermarket. They will stand posing to passers-by and amongst themselves, flirting, mocking and defying, although seldom too obviously, the centre's security staff. Furthermore, each one of the supermarket's cashiers is assisted by a 'packer', normally a youth employed by the supermarket to aid customers to fill in their bags and trolleys with the goods purchased. It is not unusual for 'packers' to be accompanied by friends, who normally sit or stand behind them, loitering, and to whom the 'packer' will occasionally, when there are no customers to assist, turn to talk, gossip and joke - about the customer who just left, for example. The youngsters will every now and then become shoppers themselves, specially if they feel their presence threatened by the action of the centre's security staff. They will then enter the shopping area and buy a soda drink or a chocolate bar, enough to give themselves the identity of a customer.

With respect to the identity of major customers, these may be classified into two basic categories. There are those who will bulk-shop at *Líder* once a week or even once a month, and there are those who will make small trips to the supermarket on a regular basis (two or three times a week) for the purchase of single items. The latter are, generally, and perhaps more importantly, also leisure trips, the prototypical shopper here being defined as a mother travelling to *Líder* with her children to provide the latter with an evening's outing. It is along those same lines that the supermarket has made its appearance in the everyday life of the people of *Norte*. For the people of *Norte* the supermarket has become a major retail landmark and their use of the centre does not conform to that of the rest of the city's population. At home, for instance, my flatmates used to visit the centre on an almost daily basis for minor purchases, such as to buy bread or milk. They would then roam about the place aimlessly, looking at refrigerators and washing machines, dining tables and couches. There are also those who would pop quickly into *Líder* to buy the paper from the centre's newsagent, to make a phone call (there is a call centre and a number of single telephone boxes), to buy a simple remedy from the in-house chemist or to withdraw money from a cash till. Still others - and amongst these university students are prominent - would walk into the supermarket to spend some spare time browsing through the books and cd's in the books and music sections. None of these visits can be properly labelled as shopping acts for the shopping itself (a newspaper, a loaf of bread or a carton of milk, a sachet of aspirins) will often not amount to more than a minimal fraction of the time that the people will end up spending hanging about the centre. In sum, the relationship that people have with the supermarket as a site of material culture can only very poorly be explained by turning to the rhetoric of consumerism and compulsion shopping (for the Chilean scene see, for example, Jocelyn-Holt Letelier, 1998; Moulian, 1997; Tironi 1999). Moreover, there is little here

that echoes Augé's characterisation of supermarkets as the ideal place where to conduct research towards an 'ethnology of solitude' (Augé, 1995).

During weekends, the number of male shoppers that can be seen increases significantly. Most will come along with their families thereby setting into contrast and underscoring the extent to which their presence is unusual. Amongst the wealthiest families men often do the weekly shopping on their own, say, for example, on a Saturday morning. Otherwise, men will only head the shopping excursion when a major familial or social event is to be held: a weekend barbecue, a birthday or, most emblematic and conspicuous, the organization of the *Fiestas Patrias*' celebrations, when men make almost every shopping decision from the amount and type of meat and coal to be bought (for a barbecue), to the brand of *pisco*, the number of plastic glasses and plates, etc.

Whether headed by a man or not, it is at weekends that most bulk shopping trips are done. More often than not, these can also be defined as a leisure activity, with families spending a Saturday or Sunday's evening in the centre, shopping, first, then having something to eat at the dining hall. Paula, a twenty-seven year old mother of two, who worked part-time for the local electricity company in the mornings and studied for a degree in Business Administration at an *Instituto Profesional* (college for higher education) in the evenings told me the following about her visits to *Líder* with her children:

For a long time there was nowhere else to go. This can get to be a very suffocating city, with so few things to do. I think that may explain why so many people looked outside the city in constructing their future: the identity problem that everybody speaks about. Well, it is hard to feel identified with something that has so little to offer. Now we have *Líder* which kind of brings together into one place a different range of alternatives: the stalls upstairs, *Homecenter* [the home-depot store], the supermarket, the restaurants. It is not as if I can afford to go to the restaurants regularly, but at least I can walk about the place with my children, get them out of home every now and then. My parents lived in Pedro de Valdivia [a nitrate refinery that is now closed] so we all enjoy going to the *pampa* festivals [I conducted this interview shortly after one of such festivals, where we both met], and my mum, or my sister, often come with me and the children to Avenida del Brasil [a promenade about which I shall talk later]. But

otherwise there are not so many occasions when one can get out and do things. I think *Líder* has become such a popular place because of that: because it allows people to get out.

Because her account had made only a passing reference to the actual shopping excursions that prompted her visits I questioned her on this front:

Well, yes, of course I go to *Líder* to shop. Having arranged it to go all the way from home it would be a waste of time not to do our shopping then. I mean, I guess that, on the one hand, we do go to *Líder* to shop; on the other hand, however, we don't go to *Líder* to shop. Do you understand me? We go with the children, and we shop, yes, but I think the children enjoy the shopping, the rambling about, sitting in the trolleys, looking at the toys, seeing other children. So it is not just for shopping that we go to *Líder* for. And then there is the dining hall, the *Cachureos* show, and the children know that they can always scratch something from us: an ice-cream, a drink, some chips. So it is not just our shopping that we do at *Líder*.

Paula's account fits nicely with an anecdote of my own. One Saturday evening I walked from my apartment in *Norte* into the supermarket, a mere two minute walk away, in order to make a long distance call from one its phone boxes. On my way to the first floor, where the restaurants and phone boxes are located, I met a friend, a lecturer at the Universidad Católica del Norte, who was very surprised to see me and blushed. He was sitting down at a table in the dining hall having coffee with a friend. I believe his embarrassment was owed to the fact that he had often spoken to me about the supermarket in rather censorious terms, vituperating against what he thought a denigrating symbol of Chilean consumerism. His own presence at the supermarket indicates quite clearly that this is rather not so. I am here not referring to my friend's ideological position (which, in any case, proved somewhat questionable) but to the mere fact of his choosing the supermarket for an evening outing. He picked the supermarket, as I myself did and many of my friends did on many occasions (without a trace of ideological guilt), because, against what the city has on offer, *Líder* offers a nice, tranquil locale to enjoy a coffee. As Paula noted, *Líder* has "brought into one place a different range of alternatives". It has, therefore, opened up the horizon of social

possibilities and the means through which the Antofagastinos can now work out the spatiality of their city. By opening itself to a number of spatial uses, *Líder* has not only expanded its potential market but has also increased the types and varieties of social relationships through which people construct their everyday lives in Antofagasta. A friend of mine, hearing me comment on the practice, on the part of some users of the supermarket, of browsing and flicking, sometimes even reading a book whilst standing up, remarked that that was what *Líder* had brought to Antofagasta, “*un lugar para estar*”, a place to be. In Spanish, the verb *estar* - one of the three existential verbs that the language has (*ser*, *estar*, *haber*), and unlike its English counterpart, ‘to be’, whose corresponding and correct translation is *ser* rather than *estar* - is spatially inclusive. (Whilst *ser* should be translated as ‘to be’, the meaning of the verb *estar* can only be conveyed, and even so very poorly, by its approximate translation for ‘to be (somewhere)’.) “*Un lugar para estar*” here thus means something like ‘a place where any spatial possibility can be played out’. A remark that should not, in any case, come as a surprise in the light of the ethnographic evidence presented.

The spatiality of shopping and shopping centres in Antofagasta, we have seen, is practiced, that is, objectified, enacted and played out, as the search for new events, a sociality defined by an ‘anything-can-happen’, ‘anything-can-be-found’ culture. It could be defined as the ‘*practice* of transcendence’, an activity whose rituality is motivated not by the (re)production of a given structure but by the search for novel events (eg. a visit to the supermarket to buy a carton of milk can hardly justify a two-hour stay at the centre). The supermarket, therefore, provides a spatial context of transience, that is of flowing and ephemeral social forms (goods, money and people), against which people can develop and deploy their own forms of social transcendence (family outings, *taquillar*).

This means that whilst the ‘world of goods’⁶⁵ does not, in itself, constitute the reason why people ‘go shopping’ (which is, in any case, far from being equated to the act of shopping itself), it is nonetheless the shopping environment - that is, the material culture of consumption - that people choose when it comes to construct their spatiality. It is against (or towards) the material circulation of people, goods and time objectified in a shopping environment that people decide to construct their social lives. It is *through* the ‘world of goods’ (not necessarily *with* them) that people pre-empt their own spatial worlds of transcendence and transience.

The element of transcendence is provided, therefore, not by the structure but by the practitioners, by the actors. It is women, children and students that sanction space as the domain of their own transcendence and the ritual of their identity - a transcendence and an identity that are perpetually recreated through the search for new events and its objectification through a shifting spatiality. It is my intention now further to elucidate these remarks by complementing the shopping evidence with other local spatial ethnographies.

5.4 Space as an Outing

In Chapter 2 I wrote about how the *pampa* revival festivals, with their open space-time structures, could be interpreted to stand as “the closest thing to a day ‘out’, in a city surrounded by a landscape where to be ‘out’ can only mean to be ‘nowhere’.” Moreover, only some paragraphs ago I quoted a similar concern by Paula, who noted how in some respects the search for an identity to the city had probably to do with the struggle for a greater sense of space and spatial possibilities. In this light, the process of coming up

⁶⁵ I am, of course, alluding to Douglas and Isherwood’s (1979) pioneering study on consumption.

with an outing, of producing a slot of space for a stretch of time, could be aptly labelled as an exercise in geographical imagination. It is in this light too that it becomes easier to see and understand the transformative and instrumental properties of space and, therefore, to acknowledge its condition as a practical category. This is also the reading that will hopefully transcend from the spatial ethnographies of *Avenida del Brasil* and the *Feria de las Pulgas* (The Flea Market).

Avenida del Brasil

Avenida del Brasil is a clear and elegant palm tree boulevard that is Antofagasta's only office and high class residential avenue. It runs parallel to the coast and is flanked by high rise residential towers and modern office buildings. To the north the avenue unfolds into the city centre whilst to the south it leads to the Gran Vía neighbourhood. In all, the boulevard extends for approximately one kilometre.

In the course of 1998 the Town Hall decided to install a set of children's games in the central esplanade of the avenue. I have already described, in Chapter 2, how this decision - an obvious attempt at sculpting a built environment manifestly extraneous to the rest of the city - was part of the modernist and ultimately capitalist ideological machinery set in motion by the local power holders to produce an urban identity. Notwithstanding the spatial selectivity underpinning the identity-building programme (privileging the city's central and southern sectors) and despite the city's north-south spatial divide, the games were soon to become a favourite spot for the weekend evening strolls of families from all over the city.

Many families, particularly those with smaller children, have made the avenue an almost compulsory destination of their Saturday and Sunday evening outings. They will

go there some time after lunch, at around 17:30, and will hang about the boulevard's games for two, sometimes even three hours. The games, which consist of a collection of swings, spiralling and straight toboggans, swinging ropes, etc., attract mainly young parents (mostly women) with their infants, generally between four and ten years old. Women will rarely go on their own with the children and if for one reason or another the father cannot accompany the family in their outing it is quite common for mothers to 'join forces' and make the trip in couples. Otherwise it is the grandmother that will accompany the mother and children to the games. This need to 'nucleate' the trip around a group of people, be they related by consanguinity or affinity, is often explained by the distances that many northern *pobladores* have to travel to get to the games. It is not unusual for families to travel for an hour on a *micro* to get to Avenida del Brasil. Once in the gardens, the parents will sit down on the benches or grass that surround the games and will talk amongst themselves whilst keeping an eye on their children (see Plate VII).

Pamela was a cousin to one of my housemates at the Gran Vía neighbourhood. She was a twenty-seven year old single mother of a six-year old boy. She lived with the child in her parent's home. I was introduced to her because my housemates knew she used to frequent the gardens in Avenida del Brasil. The house of her parents was located in one of the neighbourhoods adjacent to the avenue and that, of course, allowed her to dispose of the gardens with a rather unusual liberty. She might go with Alejandro, her son, to the gardens on an odd weekday's evening or briefly after lunch before taking him back to school. Still, the one time which she would almost ritually allocate to spend with the boy at the gardens was the Saturday evening. I accompanied her in one such outing and this is what she told me about the gardens:

I am grateful I live next to the parks. Mind you, I think I would bring my child to the parks every weekend no matter where would I live. He likes it here: he can move freely about, he

makes friends; he runs and laughs and that makes me feel good. Moreover, I myself like it here: there is no place of its kind elsewhere in Antofagasta.⁶⁶ It is nice and tranquil and safe. I can lay on the grass, relax, read a magazine; I mean, of course I keep an eye on Alejandro: these are not the safest of games and with so many children moving about it is easy for them to bump into one another and get hurt; so I do keep an eye, but still, this is a pleasant place to be at.

The idea that the gardens and children's games at Avenida del Brasil are a unique place in the whole of Antofagasta is well extended. There is at play here, again, a reference to the ideology of the healthful, safe and familial environment that I talked about in regard of the social life of streets. The mother of one of my closest friends in the field spelt this out for me by putting it even more bluntly:

I must have told Carolina [her daughter and the sister of my friend] at least one hundred times: I do not like to see my grandchildren hanging about the streets of the *población* [they all live in a northern neighbourhood]. They are not a safe place to be. I have in fact myself taken them on more than one occasion to Avenida del Brasil. I would rather be for two hours in a *micro* than having the kids out on the streets.

In addition to the infrastructure of the games, the gardens of the avenue have recently seen the arrival of a number of sideshows that cater also to the public of children. Amongst these are clowns, puppet and marionette theatres, young artists that teach children how to paint, and storytellers. The ambience of recreation and entertainment is further enhanced by the near presence of the retail environment of the *Korlaet del Parque*. Parents and children will often cross over to the supermarket to buy a refreshment, sit down for a coffee or sweet at the in-house cafe or spend some time at the children's games that are also installed in the supermarket's parking space. Not far away,

⁶⁶ This can, of course, be read as a rhetorical statement, because it all depends on what Pamela means by a "place of its kind". As for other parks and gardens or even children's games, there are a number of such locations across Antofagasta, most of which are probably to be found in the north of the city. None of these, it is true, is thought of as an 'urban space' in the way that Avenida del Brasil is, not the least because not a few of them lie in an awful state of neglect, with gardens that have dried out and games that are broken.

some three hundred metres to the south, is the Regional Stadium and the Parque Japonés. This is formally the beginning of the Gran Vía neighbourhood. Next to the stadium there is an important extension of vacant land that is occupied for most part of the year by the *Fisa*, a small private amusement park. This is located to one side of the stadium and tends to be fronted by a string of eight to ten stalls (the ‘hippy market’ or ‘hippies’, as some of my informants called them) that sell indigenous craft, tatooing, t-shirts, necklaces, earrings and rings, candles and incense. The other side, a similar extension of vacant land, albeit unused for most part of the year has been occasionally pre-empted by the seasonal visits of a travelling circus. The whole area - the stadium, its adjacent terrains and the park - are seen by most as a continuum leading to the *balneario municipal* (municipal beach) that is only some twenty five metres due east of the park. The beach is the only place in Antofagasta, other than the city centre, the nightclub district and the *Líder*, where one can find a consolidated recreational alternative, here made up of one restaurant, one ice-cream and coffee shop, a gas station, two fast-food locales and a cinema (which closed little after leaving the field). Many families will therefore conceive their visit to the children’s games in Avenida del Brasil as a first stop in an evening stroll that will also take them to the hippies’ market, to the *Fisa*, perhaps the cinema, and might even conclude with an ice-cream or a hamburger at one of the beach locales. Pamela told me of how her visits to the children’s games at Avenida del Brasil with Alejandro were often, if somebody accompanied them (Alejandro’s father, her parents or a cousin of her that was also mother to a young child), stretched into longer outings that would inevitably take them to the *Fisa* and the municipal beach resort:

Alejandro likes the amusements at the *Fisa*, and I like them too, so we often go there after spending some time at the children’s games. I prefer going with someone else, though, for

although it is not a long way there it is nicer if my parents or Alexandra [her cousin] come along. We can all then stop, perhaps, at the *Korlaet* and have a doughnut or coffee or, once in the *balneario*, go to the ice-cream shop. If we are not alone I enjoy the stroll as much as I think he enjoys it. When the Mexican Circus was last here, that was really terrific. We actually never attended any of the shows but just hung around it so he [Alejandro] could watch the elephants and the giraffes and the tigers. I think the circus was here for some three weeks and there was not one weekend when we would not stroll all the way there to see the animals.

I was intrigued by her description of their outings as a succession of stays at specific points (the games, the *Korlaet*, the *Fisa*) so I asked her if they actually stuck to the same sequence of places on every outing. This is what she replied:

No, of course not. Well, we do always walk in one direction, is that is what you mean. We start at the games and then stroll towards the Parque Japones. I don't particularly like to stop at the *Korlaet*: I find it very expensive and very small. But Alejandro knows that they have put up their own set of games there so I do tend to find myself pulled there by him. The Mexican circus, as I told you, was only here for three weeks, so now we just go straight to the *Fisa*. I like very much the hippies so if my parents have come along I do tend to leave Alejandro with them [at the *Fisa*, which is right next to the stalls of the hippies] for a brief time while I browse what they have. I love incense and candles and they have some very nice stuff there. Sometimes, if there is something worth watching at the *Gran Vía* [a cinema], we might even contemplate getting in. Then again, I remember when *Titanic* [the movie] opened: there were hundreds of people everywhere, queuing up for the movie, at the *Fisa*, at the *balneario*; there were too many people and I did not like it, so we went back home quite early.

This is, undoubtedly, a stroll where the notions of 'family' and 'material culture' influence and inscribe each other in the production of their own ideologies and categorial classifications. But it is also an occasion where an evening stroll is objectified as a concrete temporal geography (Saturday and Sunday evening) with a concrete socio-spatial rhythm (family outing). Parents (primarily women), children and the landscape of consumption (entertainment, restaurants, markets and supermarkets) are conflated to imprint Avenida del Brasil with a clear and distinguishable spatiality. The social rhythm that characterises space as an outing can be read as the fragile and delicate process of structuring transience into transcendence and viceversa. The spatiality of Avenida del Brasil is constructed as a flow of events: a stay at the games followed by a walk to the

‘hippies’, followed by a stay at the beach, followed by a quick meal at a fast-food restaurant. The stages of which the prototypical weekend evening stroll is made up are known, its structural series therefore well established. Yet the outing is constructed not as permanence at one place, but as a succession of events, as a spatial flow. Even the series of events itself remains relatively open: the children might be disappointed at not meeting with some of their friends at the games and might thus want to quickly move on to the Korlaet del Parque or the *Fisa*; the movie on screen at the cinema might attract the interest of children and parents alike; the restaurants might be too crowded; the weather too cold for a long stroll, etc. The very fact that space is constructed as a flow rather than a setting allows for a degree of flexibility in its process of structuration. In other words, it opens the transcendence of structure to the transience of the event. Transcendence comes here, therefore, not so much from that which is pursued but from those that pursue it, from its practitioners. It is the family (of which mother and children are its core structure) that ‘practices transcendence’ *in* transience, that is through a rhythmic space, and in so doing sets in motion a simultaneous process of objectification of the built and symbolic landscape.

La Feria de las Pulgas

La Feria de las Pulgas is located in one of the city’s most northern neighbourhoods. It is a stable street market that sells fish, fruits and vegetables, clothing, shoes and toys. Not everybody knows that the market operates on a daily basis, however, and its name is most often associated to an expanded and more popular version of the market that takes place solely on weekend mornings. It is to this latter version that I will dedicate my analysis (see Plates VIII *a* and VIII *b*).

The market is deployed along a sloping street that runs for approximately four hundred metres. The disposition of the stalls is relatively fixed, following the alignment that is derived from its daily (as opposed to weekend) structure. The stalls are aligned in two opposed lines, each running along one side of the street. The lines of stalls seem to adhere to some sort of classification of their produce: food products (mainly fish, fruits and vegetables, and nuts) are aligned in one set of stalls; clothing, shoes and toys, along the opposite set. There are, however, many exceptions to the rule and although the general pattern still seems to apply (it is at its most conspicuous during weekdays), few people, if asked, will know how to work it out. Moreover, at weekends the market grows substantially in size, with many ramifications growing out of the trunk of the main street (see Plate IX). The vendors in these lateral market branches rarely display their products on stalls; they tend rather to lay their items on the floor, over a large blanket or cloth. The great majority of these people, unlike those owning the main street's stalls, have no vending permit. The place is very popular amongst students in need of some extra cash. They will sell jumpers or trousers that they no longer use, suitcases, photographic cameras, chairs, study tables, lamps, etc. This kind of sale is very common when a student (or any other person, for that matter) is moving out of the city because he has just graduated from university, for example. The range of products that one can find in these lateral posts is astonishing: from sunglasses to clocks, from public telephones to bedroom mirrors, from second-hand encyclopaedias to old magazine collections.

During my time in Antofagasta I visited *las Pulgas* (as it is commonly abbreviated) six times. I made three of such visits by my own and the other three in the company of friends who were visiting the market either for casual reasons or with the purpose of selling something. A visit of the latter kind took place in 1999, when I accompanied two of my housemates in Gran Vía on a Sunday morning trip to the market. They were going

to the market to sell some clothes and artefacts that they were no longer interested in keeping. This is how my fieldwork diary entry for that trip reads:

Luis and María told me yesterday that we were going to leave early today, at around nine. It is important to get there early, they say, so that one can get a good place where to settle down and display the products. Otherwise one is forced to go way off the market's main streets, around where few people ever bother to wander about. They had stashed everything they wanted to sell into a suitcase - which was itself also to be sold - the night before. I woke up early, at quarter past eight, but we did not leave home until quarter past ten. We took number 3 [a *micro*] to get there, although we could also have boarded any of four more bus lines, for almost every bus operator modifies, if necessary, its route to go to the market on weekends. I expected the bus to be packed but it was not and that definitely helped with the carrying of the suitcase. We got to the market at around eleven. Had I not known where the market was it would have been easy to tell because almost everyone in the bus unboarded once we got there. The entrance to the market, at the lower end of the street, was crowded, with a lot of people waiting for friends or relatives and hanging about the *paraderos* [bus stops]. We started walking up the street and into the market and as we moved deeper into it it became clear that despite the crowd at the entrance attendance had not yet peaked. At a certain height up the street, some two *cuadras* [neighbourhood blocks] from the entrance, Luis and María turned right into a side street. This was an unpaved street, off the market's central (paved) street, occupied for the most part by unlicensed vendors, unlike those in the main street. There are some vendors, however, that I recognise from some previous visits, people that sell old magazine collections, mirrors, etc. There are quite a number of students too. Luis and María stopped to say hello to one or two of them. They are rarely together, however, probably because market space is allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis. We find a place, some one hundred metres into the street, lay a blanket on the ground and empty the suitcase's contents over it. Luis and María take very little care in arranging and deploying the stuff. They just make sure that everything is visible and identifiable. It is less than five minutes since they emptied the contents of the suitcase over the blanket that people start approaching our 'stall'. In about half an hour they have sold everything, cashing in around 25,000 pesos. Most of the people that approached our 'stall' and browsed the things we had for sale were women, as were the actual buyers. They were not alone, though. I would say all of them were accompanied by either their partners/husbands or their parents. Most were, too, mothers and had brought their children with them. By the time we have sold everything the rest of the street has quickly filled in with more vendors and the amount of people circulating around this side of the market has increased considerably. Luis and María ask me if I am going to stay or I am returning home with them. I ask them whether they would like to hang about with me for a short while, to which they reply that they would rather go back home straight away. I decide to leave with them. It takes us some twenty minutes, so crowded is the place now, to walk out of the side street where we were based at and down the main street into the *paraderos*. It only took us five minutes to walk that same distance when we arrived. On our way down the street, Luis and María only stop twice to look at what some stalls have on display. It is María that shows some interest even if she never stands in front of a stall for more than a minute. We leave *las Pulgas* at around one.

The market has become a key token of the city's spatiality, particularly as it regards its place in the structure of quotidian weekend life. As with other important urban spaces, the name of *las Pulgas* makes its appearance (on a Saturday morning) on the line

itineraries of those *micros* that go past the market (the market's name will disappear from the list by Monday morning). It is a morning activity, peaking in attendance at around noon. It is, also, a familial space, constructed by the family and for them. It is for that reason most unusual to see an adult on her own, unless she would be a tradesman herself. (I employ here a feminine conjugation for it is mostly women that are to be seen stallkeeping.) There is a core structure to the way that families present themselves. These are almost as a rule made up by the mother, the children and, occasionally, the mother-in-law or the father. The presence of the latter is often exclusive, so that if the mother-in-law comes the father does not, and viceversa. The market's space is in very important respects, therefore, gendered and aged.

People attend *las Pulgas* for a variety of reasons: to sell or buy something; as a way of spending the morning out in the company of friends or relatives. There is, however, an important distinction between users. People living in the south of town, like Luis, María and myself then did, do not normally attend the market unless they have some specific business to carry out there. In this sense the market is certainly not a showcase for the presentation of all social groups regardless of their class affiliation. Very few of the people that inhabit the south of the city ever go to the market, except, perhaps, for students, who, then again, only do so for practical purposes. Many informants (and Luis and María did, when I asked them about it) would, on a self-conscious reflection, concede that those inhabiting the city's southern neighbourhoods would think of visiting the market as something *mal visto* (badly seen). Others simply said that they had nothing to do there: that the place was too far away, too crowded, and that they could anyhow buy just as cheap if not cheaper produce elsewhere. In some cases (all women), the market was explicitly described as *picante* (spicy), meaning gross, even lewd. (In regard of nightclubs, for example, the term is used to describe clubs where there is an explicit

sexual tension in the air.) A corollary that was often added to such description was that the market was full of *rotos* (ragged people) and *pandillas* (groups of youths). These are all social as well as environmental categories for, as was mentioned in regard of the social life of streets, there is a mutual implication between those who occupy a space and that space's characterization.

Amongst the inhabitants of Antofagasta's northern neighbourhoods, however, attending *las Pulgas* has become *the* thing to do on a weekend - particularly Sunday - morning. Attendance at the market on an ordinary weekday is very low. The place has lost all competitive edge in favour of downtown supermarkets, specially since *Lider's* arrival in the city. It is not, therefore, its nature as a shopping market that attracts people on a weekend morning. The few people that do use *las Pulgas* for shopping do so on a weekday, when the place is scantily attended and there is no queuing up in front of any stall. On a weekend, attending *las Pulgas* becomes an almost compulsory excursion, an outing to one of the city's most entertaining public spectacles, a promenade along an outdoors urban theatre of spontaneity. This is exactly how César described the market for me. I met César in 1997 when he was about to complete a degree in Business Administration at the Universidad de Antofagasta. He was then forty-seven and had joined the university shortly after the reinstatement of democracy in 1989. During the military dictatorship he had been the leader of the main clandestine mining workers' union. He became, however, disillusioned with the way that the process of redemocratization had been handled and decided to step away from politics. When I met him he survived on casual, one-off consultancy work to small and medium enterprises, built on his detailed knowledge of the region's industry. He lived with his mum and a partner of eleven years in a very modest house in the city's north. Both his mother and his partner owned a fruit stall at *las Pulgas*. I visited the market one Saturday afternoon

with him, on our way to pick up his mother and partner from work. These are some of the comments he then made about the market:

I do not enjoy coming here anymore. I used to come a lot, though. When Barbara [a daughter from a previous marriage] was a smaller kid we used to come here almost every Sunday morning... [I ask him why] ... Well, it was a way of spending the morning, and things have changed now, you would not see 'human sculptures' before, for example; it is far more recreational now, like going to the theatre, like people come here in search of novelty now. You see, ten years ago Antofagasta was a completely different city: there were no high towers then, this was a much quieter town, and coming to the market on a weekend morning was one of the few chances you had of getting to do something; plus, of course, people actually came here to shop, we had no *Lider* then, remember?... These are hard times for some of the people [vendors] here. The people that come to the market are no longer making a shopping trip but merely hanging around for fun. See, there are very few people carrying shopping bags. It is all families or *patoterros* [groups of teenagers]. You do get the occasional shopper, and people do occasionally shop, but with no great reliance no more... I would say this is the *Lider* of the poor (laughs).

There are some inconsistencies in César's account, as when he says that he used to attend *las Pulgas* almost everyday Sunday when her daughter was smaller even if the market was not as recreational then as it is today. Ten years ago, he points out, the market was one of the few places you could go out to on a weekend outing. Yet this is precisely what the consolidation of the market as a recreational alternative (of which he himself speaks) has brought about. I think his inconsistencies are explained by the fact that he is forced to account for a reality of which he no longer participates. He no longer enjoys (or, at any rate, *attends*) the market because he has no longer a younger child whom to take there. The spatial possibilities that the market once offered him are now closed. The way in which he now relates to the *las Pulgas* has more to do with the latter being a market than an outing. We may therefore say that what attracts *families* to *las Pulgas* is its open-ended structure. That *las Pulgas* is a market is something that nobody will question. In infrastructural terms it is undoubtedly, therefore, a market place. Having said so, few people, if anybody at all, will talk today of going to *las Pulgas* as making a shopping trip (at most, people, for example Luis and María, will speak of

going to the market to *sell* something; even César's ambivalent account hovered between the description of *las Pulgas* as a market and a recreational alternative). People will go to *las Pulgas* to *pasar la mañana* (spend the morning), therefore appropriating the place more for its temporal than its spatial qualities. What is at stake here is how to best make time pass. In this light, the form that the market takes, the forces that condition its spatiality, are but an adaptation to the temporal requisites underlying its sociality. *Las Pulgas* is here, therefore, a spatial form created to free and let run the flowing of time. That this is so is evinced from a brief recapitulation of what goes on in the market. On the one hand, the market's popularity is well established by the fact that many of the peddlers and street traders that can be seen rambling Antofagasta's downtown on a normal weekday are attracted to *las Pulgas* during the weekend. Many of these people trade in sweets, chocolate bars, nuts, etc., and are known amongst people for hanging also about the students' *paradero* in Calle José Santos Ossa. Their presence in *las Pulgas* underscores the point made earlier that the market is a place to go with the family, especially with children. There is a similar representation of street artists, the aforementioned mimes, musicians (here, mostly men playing guitar) and 'human sculptures'. That the market is not so much a market as a spatial instrument to enable the passing of time is further shown by its own internal temporality. Those who are genuinely interested in shopping (such as might be the case, for example, of those after the bargains that are being sold by students, people moving out of town, those suffering from economic recession, etc.) will attend the market first thing in the morning, definitely not later than 11:00am. After that, most bargains are already gone and the market becomes so crowded that it is altogether impossible to move swiftly from stall to stall, or even to stay put at one stall whilst examining any particular item. The temporality of the market is enhanced by the presence of people trading in 'single goods'

(shoe laces, batteries, sachets of vitamin C and aspirins, milk powder, buttons, newspapers, ice creams), goods that cater for a spontaneous, capricious acquisition. Most of these vendors will situate themselves right in the middle of the market's main street, between the opposing lines of stalls. They cater to the flowing mass of people that moves up and down the main street, walking slowly and browsing from the distance the products displayed on the flanking stalls. In one of my visits I recognised one such trader from the *paradero* in Calle José Santos Ossa. I saluted him and asked him how he was doing. "Well", he said, "here I am, trying to be noticed". The positioning of these traders in single goods denotes an acknowledgement on their part of the fact that the appropriation of the market has more to do with people and social relationships flowing - a shifting spatiality - than with a geography of fixed commercial stalls. I believe therefore that the description of the spatial uses to which *las Pulgas* is put rehearses, if under a different guise, the same themes that were brought out by the spatial ethnographies of Avenida de Brasil and the shopping environments of Calle Prat and *Líder*. That is, the constitutive agency of women and children in the spatialization of the city; and the production and opening up of new spatial worlds of sociality through their pre-emption of existing urban landscapes. In sum, that space, in Antofagasta, is a generative structure or structure of possibilities: a social dimension through which people attempt to circumnavigate the limitating and imposing environment of the desert; or, paraphrasing the words with which I introduced this section, a means through which people try to get 'out' in a city surrounded by a landscape where to be 'out' can only mean to be 'nowhere'.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RITUALS OF SPACE (II)

This chapter is to be read as a complement to Chapter 5. In Chapter 5 I aimed at showing how space, in Antofagasta, is constructed as a landscape of possibilities, that is, a social dimension through which people attempt to expand the forms of their sociality and overcome the limitations that are imposed on them by the desert environment. In sum, that space is a-becoming (or event-like) rather than a-given (or structure-like). In Chapter 6 I will follow up my explorations on the nature of space in Antofagasta by focusing on what a number of annual events have in common with the spatiality of everyday life. It is the case that the nature of the ethnographic material presented here, a sample of annual happenings whose occurrence is, by definition, circumstantial, lends itself with particular ease to the thesis that I am holding. This should not make the case any less strong for that. That the spatiality of these happenings is defined by practice (and as such objectified) rather than structure serves, if anything, to accentuate the extent to which the whole social life of Antofagasta is characterised by such a propensity.

6.1 Fiestas Patrias

Although the formal independence of Chile from Spain was not proclaimed until 1818, the first signs of an emancipatory movement appeared in 1808, on occasion of the French invasion of Spain. On September 18, 1810, a provisional Chilean government was established that was, in theory, only to rule the country until the Spanish authority was properly reinstated. That, of course, never happened, and the date is today

commemorated as the ‘Fatherland’ Festivity (*Fiestas Patrias*), an equivalent to the Day of Independence. This is followed, on September 19, by the celebration of the Day of the Armed Forces. By holding both dates as national holidays a general collective sense of festivity has developed around the unitary symbolic frame of *ser chileno* (being Chilean): the Day of the Armed Forces is celebrated with a showy and pompous military parade in Santiago that is broadcast by national television; and there is the legal obligation to publicly display on one’s home, be it from a balcony, a window or a pole, the national flag. In many important respects, however, the patriotic element is overridden by the force of an encompassing gaiety and the overwhelming spirit of *pasarlo bien* (having a good time). There even is a named coined for this particular spirit and that is *espíritu dieciochero* (Spirit of the Eighteenth, SoE). This has spilled over and extended beyond the dates to which the celebrations are calendrically attached, and the temper and mood of the festivities are embraced now for well over a week’s time in advance.

The fact that the spirit of the celebrations is well anticipated in time does not help in the description of the festivities. There is, in fact, already an insinuation of this complication in the way in which a festivity that is meant to apply to a single day (September 18) is semantically left undefined by its construction in the plural (*Fiestas Patrias*, literally ‘Fatherland’ Festivities). There are, therefore, many different festivities. This is not just in the sense of the different kinds of activities that people attend to (which is the case), but also in regard of the different temporalities that mark the beginning of the *fiestas*. Perhaps the best way to account for the shifting contexts and modes in which the festivities are celebrated will be to recount chronologically the manner in which the atmosphere builds up and to supply a sample of the kinds of events through which this takes place.

On occasion of the 1999 *Fiestas Patrias*, *Líder*, the supermarket, redecorated its interior with patriotic motifs and launched special ‘festive’ offers and discounts some two weeks before the actual holidays. Promoters were dressed up in traditional *huaso* (Chilean southern cowboys and girls) clothes, the store’s landscape was decorated with Chilean flags and flag-coloured ribbons, the store’s take-away food section became well stocked with traditional Chilean cuisine and there was a continuous play of Chilean folklore music on the supermarket’s speakers. Ten days before the actual holiday most of the city’s taxis, *colectivos* and buses were already displaying giant flag-coloured ribbons across their front or back windshields. Three to five days before September 18, university lectures and school classes were suspended and a series of festive activities organized instead. These consisted of intrafaculty barbecues (organized for and by senior members), student games (called Creole Games), games for employees, and the formal holding of a *fonda* (of which I shall talk later). Typical to all these activities was to accompany the get-together with a barbecue (*asado*), the importance of which varied depending on the degree of intimacy relating the attendants. María, a close friend of mine, journalist and part-time lecturer at a local university, whom I already introduced in relation to her visits to *Líder*, described to me how her week had been affected by the *espíritu dieciochero*:

This is crazy. There are so many things going on that I simply do not know how to organize my day [I ask her what is exactly going on...]... Well, today [Wednesday 15], we had a combined student-staff department barbecue earlier in the day and we are supposed to get together for a faculty barbecue later in the evening. Tomorrow, we have a staff barbecue and I have another barbecue at the paper [the newspaper she works for] at the same time. Moreover, Juan [her husband] has been invited to a barbecue at a friend’s house to which I would also like to go. On Friday morning there is the university *fonda* and a barbecue at Jorge’s [her son] school. No matter how much she insists I simply cannot make it to Lorena’s [her daughter] school barbecue: I have to make time at some point to go to *Líder* and buy the stuff for Saturday’s barbecue [she is referring here to their own family barbecue].

I should add here that universities do not, in this respect, differ substantially from other institutional or corporate organizations (firms, local government, clubs). There is, everywhere, a superabundance of gatherings and get-togethers, the paradigmatic form of which are the *asados*. This is a time where all known social networks are activated, rendering the favourite of all Chilean verbs, *compartir* (to share), its most exuberant and radical meaning. What is being shared here is the mutual presence of the Other; it is the sharing of people, rather than things, that is sought, and this is best exemplified in the social gathering *par excellence*, the barbecue, where the formality of the occasion is relaxed in deference to what is really important: social relationships.

A brief word about *asados*. In Antofagasta most social gatherings were given the explicit form of an *asado*. *Tesito* and barbecues were undoubtedly the two most significant ways in which the Antofagastinos got together. What differs one get-together from the other is the apparent formality with which they are structured and set up. *Tesito* is by definition a spontaneous social occasion. It is a light meal and it is one to which many people are self-invited (that being perhaps the reason why it is a light meal; otherwise turning out to be far too expensive to cook for an unknown number of guests). *Tesito* is a form of sociality that is used to round off other forms of sociality, such as when one invites fellow students to tea after an evening study; alternatively, it is a social occasion that accompanies or complements other forms of sociality, as when neighbours invite each other for tea to watch the soap opera together. An *asado*, on the other hand, is characterized by a little bit more formality. They are temporally and spatially anticipated: formal invitations being issued for a specific date, time and place. The most important social occasions are punctuated with an *asado*: birthdays, job placements, farewells, etc. Unlike *tesito*, the food is here an important element of the occasion. The meat and coal have to be purchased beforehand, and generally the alcohol also. Most

barbecues are held at night, rarely before 10:00pm, although it is not altogether unusual to have them in place of a lunch. Very little cooking takes place before the guests have arrived. When it does, it only involves the preparation of light salads. The meat is only placed on the barbecue once most guests have arrived, and it is not necessarily done, although she may play a leading role, by the event's host. On the contrary, once the barbecue's fire has been lit and the first slices of meat and sausages are on the grill, the event's structure, if it may be called so, is revealed, with people then hanging freely about the barbecue, talking to each other, occasionally taking over the care of the barbecue, adding or removing meat, resuming their place in a conversation. The importance of the food is then subsumed to the explicit sociality of the occasion. Moreover, this is in fact underscored by the fact that the food that is prepared is always the same. There is, true, some slight consideration of 'management skills', that is, how to best light a barbecue, when to place the meat on the grill, when to remove it, etc., but these are very rarely taken too seriously. Barbecues are always arranged in the backyards of people's houses. Once in the backyard people will split into different groups and will then circulate freely between groups or will form new groups. Everyone is standing up and are therefore eating the food in that position. There is a sense in which what brought people together in the first place - having dinner - is now subsumed to the revealed purpose of chatting, telling jokes (the so-called *tallas*, half jokes, half anecdotes, and an incredibly important form of social relationship), in sum, of *compartir* together. It is common for barbecues to go on for the whole night, say, five, even sometimes six in the morning, with people eventually getting to dance or moving inside the house to talk. The structural (in space-time terms) formality of the barbecue thus conceals the informality

with which it is played out. It is an occasion that is convened to produce looseness and familiarity. An event that is structured to produce spontaneity and novelty.⁶⁷

There is a vague temporal vector at play structuring the activation and reproduction of social relationships during the festivities. Even if at work from several days before, the SoE is in many respects understood as a *crescendo* of social activities that is to peak naturally on the night of September 18. Cynthia, a nurse whom I accompanied to most of her 1999 celebrations, spelt this out for me. Her account will also serve to illustrate how the overall structure of the festivities is thought of and constructed.⁶⁸

C: I would have liked to spend the *fiestas* at home, but when I looked into it it was already too late and there were no bus tickets left for Arica [a city some 1000 km north of Antofagasta]. It is OK, though, we have arranged something with Pilar [her flatmate], and we'll have friends coming over, it will be nice.

Q: How does your family feel about that?

C: My mum is a bit disappointed, and so is my little brother, I haven't seen him since Christmas and I think he sort of expected me to come over during *fiestas*. I would have loved to be there, to be *regaloneada* [cherished]. I feel a bit stupid for not having looked into the ticket business before.

Q: About those friends that you are having over, are they people from work?

C: No, no. Most go back to my university days. We will be organizing something at the medical centre [that is, at work] anyway. I think Pilar will bring some friends from work, though. I think she kind of likes a boy there.

Q: So when are your friends coming over?

C: Saturday [September 18]. Pilar suggested Friday, so that we could go dancing on Saturday, but I thought it was too much of a hassle: having to go to *Líder* on the Friday afternoon, and who knows how long our get-together at the medical centre will take; no, it's much better this way. And we can go to the Kamikaze [a nightclub] on Friday.

Q: So you will leave the shopping for Saturday?

C: Yes... [vacillating] I know it's not the best of days, for everybody leaves their shopping for the last minute. I could probably go by myself on the Thursday evening. We have some kind of get-together then organized by the National Health Service which I am not very keen on attending. But I don't like to do the shopping by my own: it's *fome* [boring]. Besides, I wouldn't know what to buy, and I am not sure how many people will be coming nor what do Pilar's friends like to drink. I'd rather wait for Saturday and go along with her.

⁶⁷ This search for spontaneity and novelty in the articulation of social relationships is reflected in language use and the many terms that are coined and employed colloquially to denote states of boredom or inactivity (*fome, flojera, plancha*) and excessive gravity and seriousness (*brígido, denso, pesado*).

⁶⁸ In the following transcription 'C' stands for Cynthia's comments while 'Q' stands for my questions.

I believe there are two themes that can be extrapolated from Cynthia's remarks. On the one hand, that Cynthia's experience of the *fiestas* can be very much reduced to each and every one of the events (get-togethers) that she partakes of. She seems to think of and articulate the *fiestas* as a succession of events or outings (to *Líder*, to a nightclub, to a get-together). (This can in fact also be applied to what we heard María say only some paragraphs above.) On the other hand, it also seems that, for Cynthia, the night of the *dieciocho* represents the end point of a cumulative process of socialization. It is a night to be spent in the company of family and best friends. To use a spatial metaphor, there is a sense in which the SoE represents a movement from the periphery of sociality to its core, from the superficiality of social relations (at work, school, etc.) to the authentic intimacy of home. That is certainly the case in many families across the city. The barbecues that are held on the nights of the seventeenth and eighteenth are the most significant and emblematic *asados* of the year. Such is the significance attached to the event that it is for such an occasion that men can be seen - sometimes for the first and last time of the year - accompanying their partners to do the corresponding shopping. It is men that will select the meat and decide on the quantity and kind of alcoholic drinks that will be bought. There is little attempt here at hiding that there are many good chances of getting drunk that night. Moreover, there are many good causes too, for there are no reasons, the argument goes, to inhibit and restrain one's behaviour when one is in the company of loved and dear ones. I asked Francisco, a thirty-four year old bank clerk who studied for a degree in Public Policy at the Universidad de Antofagasta in the evenings, and who had just recently fathered a boy, how the *asados* of the *fiestas* compared to other barbecues and what was so special about them:

It is *rico* [cosy, nice] to get together with the family and friends. We eat and dance; we dance *cueca* [the national folklore dance], drink *chicha* [sweet wine]; I don't know, I really enjoy it.

[But what does it make these *asados* special, I ask...] They are different, like more intense, everybody is in a good mood, everybody is *tomando* [drinking] and dancing and having a good time. It's sort of like Christmas, you know, like the family and friends come over and we all have a real good time together. But then again it's different from Christmas, because you don't get *chicha* then and, I don't know, it's just more *chileno* [Chilean] now.

This sense of social authenticity - of being with friends and family, of being Chilean - that is conveyed by celebrating the *dieciocho* at home is replicated in the *ramadas* and *fondas*⁶⁹. These are the most important social institutions of the *fiestas*. In theory, these are models of the traditional public houses and inns - typical from the rural south - where communal festivities used to be held in the past. Originally they were built out of palm tree leaves (that is the origin of the word *ramada*, from *rama*, leaf). Still today they are flimsy and makeshift structures, despite the leaves now being made out of plastic. In Antofagasta, the use of the terms is almost limited to refer to the *Ramadas Populares* (Ramadas of the People) that are sponsored by the Town Hall. There are other *ramadas* but people will rarely refer to them by that name; at most, they will be called *fondas*, or people will simply talk about inviting each other to an *asado* or a party. The *Ramadas Populares* are the biggest and most important of the city, with perhaps some twenty individual *ramadas* within them. (The word is seen therefore to designate both the concept and the individual locale.) They are open, on average, for five days, starting on the night of the sixteenth and concluding on the night of the twentieth. In Antofagasta it is also common for the grounds that house the *ramadas* to accommodate a number of bazaar and market stalls, selling crafts, trinkets, toys, and amusement games such as target practice (I shall talk more about these later). In 1999 the *Ramadas Populares* were held in the city's hippodrome, located in the far north. Some saw this as a dividing gesture, restricting the *ramadas* to where they properly belonged: the popular sectors of

⁶⁹ Although, in principle, the terms refer to distinct types of public houses (the *fonda* a more solid construction than the *ramada*), their meanings are today conflated in common usage.

the city. Domingo, a thirty year old plumber who was pursuing a degree in engineering at one of the local universities, thus remarked:

You see, this does not happen in other cities: the *ramadas* are for everyone not just the poor. It is this city, which is so classed-biased: people are scared of going to the north, of mixing with other people. [What do those people then do, I ask...] They set up their own *fondas*, where they know they will only see familiar faces. That is why every private school and every club and every association ends up setting up their own *fondas*. But I tell you something: I don't care, my friends and I are going there [to the *Ramadas Populares*] tonight, that's the real stuff, to be there, drinking and singing. I don't mind getting into trouble, that's part of it, that's what's good about going there, that it is authentic...

The locales at the *Ramadas Populares* resemble very little their original models (if, perhaps, for the precarious nature, in many cases deliberate, of their structures). They are built offhandedly. The ground surface itself is used as a floor; tables and chairs are plastic, often sponsored by soft drinks or beer companies. Their atmospheres are imbued of density, charged with the vapours of spirits and greasy foods. Their managers brag about the 'traditional', 'homemade' and 'authentic' quality of their cuisine, and yet most of their profits come from the sale of fast-food alternatives: hot-dogs and hamburgers. Most locales put on live shows at night, in 1999 there being a preference for *tropical* music bands. There is an extended complaint that the *fiestas* have seen a persistent erosion of 'authentic' values, such as with the gradual cornering and displacement of *cueca* (the national dance) in favour of mass consumption musical preferences like *tropical* or *cumbia*. The *ramadas* and *fondas* stand in an ambiguous position here for they are seen as both conveyors of the new tendencies and symbols of all that which is still *popular* (in the sense of having to do with the common people and tradition). This is Cynthia again speaking:

It is very different now, things have changed; nobody listens to *cueca* anymore except for the *fiestas*; nobody knows how to dance *cueca* [she herself did not know]; now it's all *tropical*... I don't like going to the *ramadas* [*populares*] because it is *picante* [spicy] and lewd there. Men

get into ridiculous competitions to see who can drink more, it is sort of about who is the more *macho*. It is not authentic anymore, it is just gross, with people getting drunk and into fights. Lots of *pandillas* [groups of youths] go there now. Some people like it there, though, because of the spirit and the bonds that are formed. I mean, you can get together with people whom you do not know and you sing with them and dance with them and drink with them; I don't know, I guess that does not happen at home or in a nightclub.

In line with Cynthia's remarks, many of my informants and friends warned me against staying in the *ramadas* after 11:00pm for, they said, the place then becomes dangerous to hang around. The symbolic classification that triggered such judgements can be traced back to my discussion on the social life of streets in Chapter 5. The *ramadas* are dirty and dusty, the grounds on which they are built are not paved, their atmosphere is greasy and sticky; they are located in the city's north and it is mostly youths that attend them these days. It is not difficult to see at play here, therefore, the symbolic mechanism that works to classify the environment of the *ramadas* as unhealthful, polluting and dangerous.

In spite of the many criticisms that are levelled against the *ramadas* many people are still visiting them. It is true, though, that most of the people that go to the *ramadas* belong to Antofagasta's lower classes and that they are a favourite destination for groups of youths. Amongst the latter many are, in line with Domingo's remarks only some lines above, responding to the claims about authenticity and Chilean identity around which the *popular* (in its Chilean sense of both commonality and popularity) base of the *ramadas* is built. There is something about getting together in a *ramada*, these people argue, that marks off the *fiestas* from other festivities and celebrations. Eduardo, who worked as a technician at one of the hinterland's mines, thus told me:

There's nothing quite like being there. I mean, it's like you're out and you're with friends, *tomando juntos* [drinking together], *compartiendo* [sharing], everybody is in such a good mood, it's kind of spiritual, you know, like you can be with people you have never seen before and behave as if you were old friends.

I was intrigued by Eduardo's use of the word 'out' so I asked him to explain what he meant by that:

Well, you're not at home and, I don't know, it's a different setting, I guess, like you *compartes* [share] as if you were at home but you're not. [Like going to a nightclub, I ask...] No, no, it's different: in a nightclub you stick to your friends; in the *ramadas* you can mingle with everybody. You see, it's the *espíritu dieciochero*.

Eduardo, like Francisco and Domingo before him, placed great emphasis on the central values of solidarity and communality (of sharing and drinking together) that are expressed during the *fiestas*.⁷⁰ In this vein, it is surprising how the consumption of alcohol is used to objectify the values of friendship and familiarity. The *Fiestas Patrias* are a time when one's attachment to a particular social group (family, friends, etc.) is expressed, even sublimated, in a process of socialization that peaks on September 18. The idiom of this process of socialization is the act of *compartir* (sharing). The most elevated form of sharing is to share one's intimacy, one's selfhood. This is the culmination of a process of socialization that consisted in the casting off of superficiality. The exposition of one's intimacy is not an easy task, however. There is nothing wrong, therefore, in assisting this collective process of exposure with the aid of a little drinking, it is said, that will help one to get rid off the last layers of sociality. This might be why Chileans speak of themselves as *buenos para tomar* (good for drinking, meaning heavy drinkers). They are, of course, not saying that whenever they drink they get drunk but, on the contrary, that they can drink a lot without getting drunk. This is significant because what might be at stake here is to demonstrate that one can drink as much alcohol as it is necessary to get intimate without losing oneself to the downside

⁷⁰ It is tempting to see here an echo of Victor Turner's concept of 'communitas' (1969). Moreover, the fact that the *fiestas* could be interpreted as a 'liminal' situation may, in this instance, enhance the pertinence of the analogy.

effects of the spirit. To be drunk is to indulge in antisocial behaviour, to be an *antisocial*. Drinking, however, is an expressly social activity, one that is sanctioned - and sanctions - by the authentic and solid values of the group.

In Antofagasta there are many *ramadas* and *fondas*, even if, as I mentioned earlier, only the People's Ramadas tend to be called by that name. Many people told me that the number of *ramadas* in Antofagasta was by all accounts unusual, that this was not a common practice elsewhere in the country, where everyone attended the *Ramadas Populares* set up by the local authorities. I did not carry out a count of the *ramadas* that were set up in 1999. An approximate typology, however, would include the *Ramadas Populares*, the *Ramadas Militares* (Ramadas of the Military), *ramadas* set up by schools (generally private schools) and universities, by neighbourhoods, by professional guilds (eg. firemen), by clubs and associations, and by firms. Some informants glossed this mushrooming of *ramadas* all across the city as proof of the severe classism that defined its social structure. Domingo, for instance, whom I quoted earlier, remarked that people were willing to set up their own *ramadas* in order to be able to bring together just their friends. On the other hand, a classic sociological interpretation (as offered by some local academics) highlighted the division between public and private spaces⁷¹. For my part, I subscribe to a somewhat different interpretation.

I do not think that the fragmented spatialization of the *ramadas* responds to a division of the social structure along class lines. This is because even if I do think that the city (like the rest of Chilean society) is in many important respects structured around class and status idioms, this is in no way axiomatic or unchanging. People of different classes end up meeting and *compartiendo* in the multitude of *asados* and *fondas* that are organized by firms, clubs, guilds, local authorities, etc. Moreover, that the social

⁷¹ And, by extension, all spatial versions of systems of dual symbolic classification (eg. DaMatta, 1985).

structure is organized in terms of class does not explain why the *fiestas* are celebrated in the form of a *fonda* or an *asado* or a *ramada*. It may explain why certain people get together but it does not explain why they choose to do it the way they do.

The proliferation of *ramadas* in Antofagasta cannot be explained either as the fabrication of domains for the collective privatization of sentiments (public vs. private spaces). There is certainly a social tendency towards concentrating on the socialization of intimacy and privileging this against the superficiality of other forms of sociality. This is not the same as saying, however, that there is a preference for privatizing social relationships. As a matter of fact, a recurrent commentary amongst the people attending the *Ramadas Populares* was that the place enabled them to *compartir* with people whom they did not know. Rodney Needham has shown that the concept of opposition is a relational metaphor derived from a spatial intuition (Needham, 1987). This may explain why the pair sociality/intimacy is metamorphosed into exteriority/interiority and thereon spatialized as public/private. Yet this is a presupposition that needs to be proven empirically. If space is taken to be a structural category (that is, both physically and socially), then there are grounds for presuming that the social classification of sentiments into a relation of opposition (sociality/intimacy) may well be replicated spatially through the idiom of public vs. private spaces. If space, however, is understood as a practical category, as spatiality, then there are no reasons for presuming such a spatial classification. I will return to the ethnography to explain myself.

To start with, the spatial opposition public/private leaves too many particulars unattended. It is, in the case of Antofagasta, a sweeping generalization with little concern for the ethnographic fact. The characterization of the *espíritu dieciochero* (SoE) as the cumulative process of socializing one's intimacy, if indeed, to some extent, adequately abstracted as a relation of opposition (from sociality to intimacy), could, however,

equally be analysed as a question of gradation. In this light, the importance of the many barbecues that are organized in the days preceding the holidays comes to the forefront. There is a temporal geography at work here, with different social environments organizing their own barbecues at different times (and places) throughout the week. Take, for instance, the case of María, my journalist and part-time lecturer friend. She would first encounter the spirit of the *fiestas* at the supermarket (eg. *Líder*)⁷², two weeks before the actual holiday. In terms of the SoE the supermarket would no doubt occupy a very marginal position. But is this true? From the perspective of everyday life the place that the supermarket would occupy in the life of my friend would be no different from that of any other day. And from our analysis of the role that supermarkets play in the life of the Antofagastinos (Chapter 5) we know that this would be relatively important, more so if, as is the case, she leads a family life. But let's move on. Four days before September 18 María attended an institutional barbecue that had been organized by the Regional Government. She decided to attend it in spite of the various others get-togethers that the *fiestas* had filled her agenda with. This is how she described the occasion to me:

I met with Sandra and Álvaro [fellow journalists] and we got there at around seven. At the barbecue I saw people from the *Católica* [the university she works part-time for] but I vaguely spoke with them for I get to see them everyday and, in any case, I will hang out with them as soon as we organize our own *asado* at the faculty. [Whom did you spend most of the evening with, I ask...] I bumped into the administrator who is coordinating one of my research projects at the Town Hall, so I asked him about that, about the other stuff he is coordinating; I did not stay for long, though, so in the end I spent most of the evening with Pedro [the administrator].

María ended up talking to a person who allowed her to relate the singularity of the *asado* to the quotidian life she leads outside the days of the *fiestas*. Moreover, she

⁷² I have been told that the Korlaet chain of supermarkets has launched the advertising campaign of the

decided not to talk to certain people on the basis that she gets to see them everyday. At all times, María makes sense of the barbecue by relating it to the structure of everyday life that encompasses it. There is a sense in which what is important is to render the barbecue a formality, an event that is to be reintegrated, and not too conspicuously for that, to the overarching flow of the SoE. This can be extended to most of the social events that she will partake of during the *fiestas* (and they can be counted in the tens: university events, events at the school of her children, an event at her Neighbourhood Board, at her Mother's Club, at the Rotary Club or the Society for Burnt Children to which she belongs, or her gymnasium, etc., etc.). Few of the get-togethers that are organized in the days preceding September 18 are therefore held to be memorable events. There is no doubt that different events will support different kinds of social relationships, depending on the context and underlying social structure of the occasion. Yet the place that each event will occupy in the social rhythm of everyday life will only under extraordinary circumstances affect the flow of the quotidian. The SoE lessens the importance of each individual event, which is subsumed by it, and yet the practice of everyday life, of which each individual event itself forms part, minimizes in turn the importance of the SoE. From the point of view of space what we have is an overwhelming flood of social relationships, criss-crossing and meeting at different times and different places, and reintegrating themselves to the social flow that is structuring the week and that is, in reality, none other than the practice of everyday life. At this point I will in fact allow María to describe this in her own words:

During the *fiestas* there are many things going at once, yes, but I don't think that the kinds of activities that we get together for, you know, the *asados* and the parties, I don't think they differ in any special way from those that we attend at other times. The *fiestas* are special, they are more intense, I mean, they are **the** *fiestas*, but even so, you know how this city is, people

get together whenever they have the chance to... You know that the *fiestas* are taking place, you know when they are taking place, is not as if they suddenly happen, so you plan for them, you kind of anticipate them, if you see what I mean. It's like you are prepared for what is to come, in fact you are actually looking forward to it.

María was quite plainly telling me that the spirit of the festivities was normalized in respect of the social rhythms of everyday life (where 'everyday life' stands for a structure of social practices). I had to stop looking for what was special about the *fiestas* and concentrate instead on what was not special, that is, on what they shared with everyday life. The activities that punctuate the festivities are certainly not normal, but because they are integrated within a temporality that has an overall social duration of two weeks (if of varying intensity) they have, to a great extent, been accommodated to the general flow of the quotidian. This can be further demonstrated by reference to the ethnography discussed in Chapter 4. There I alluded to the many get-togethers that are organized during a normal week: to have *tesito* or watch the evening soap opera together, at a meeting of the school board, as a member of an association or a guild or a *Colectividad Extranjera* (the famous *colonias* or Foreign Cultural Collectivities), etc. The many events that are organized during the *Fiestas Patrias* are therefore little more than replicating, if under a different frame, the flow of social relationships that structures the rhythm of everyday life in Antofagasta.⁷³ People rely on their established social networks to set up their own *ramadas* and events. When asked, for instance, which *ramada* was the best one to go to, most people replied that the *Ramadas Populares* were very dangerous and lewd, and that I would get a much better picture of a typical Chilean

⁷³ The arguments for the case that I am making here, that the events of the *fiestas* reflect the wider structure of the everyday, are not unlike Mary Douglas' defence of food as a system of communication (1972, 1982). Take, for instance, the following remark, extracted from her "Deciphering a Meal": "the meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies. Each meal carries something of the meaning of the other meals; each meal is a structured social event which structures others in its own image... Each exemplar has the meaning of its structure realized in the examples at other levels" (Douglas, 1972: 69-70).

ramada if I went to the Ramadas of the Military. I visited the latter on the night of September 18 1997 and again, two years later, on the night of September 17. Rather than a *ramada*, however, what I attended was more like a private fête for the relatives of the military. A military barrack had been rather poorly decorated with the Chilean flag and hanging flag-coloured ribbons. A long table was used as a bar from which soda drinks, beer and Chilean *empanadas* (pastries) were sold. A disc jockey had been hired and played, to a dancing public of children and mature adults, music from teenage bands such as the Backstreet Boys or Britney Spears, occasionally some *tropical*, and even more rarely a *cueca* or two. A friend of mine described the atmosphere as proper of a “wedding banquet”. I then found out that few of those who so eloquently spoke about the *Ramadas Militares* had ever been to them, and, from talking to some of the officers that I met in my two visits, that these were organized to provide the families, and specially the children of the military, a safe environment where to celebrate the *fiestas*. The same could be said about the rest of the *ramadas* and *fondas* that are scattered around the city. They are get-togethers not unlike those that are part and parcel of everyday sociality in Antofagasta.

This continuous ‘flow of social relationships’, a flow that is integral to the structure of everyday life in Antofagasta, is what shapes the spatiality of the city during *Fiestas Patrias*. There are no divisions along class lines here nor the spatial reflection of a system of dual symbolic classification. What is at work, rather, is the fairly common and unexceptional practice of the quotidian. The flow of social relationships that characterizes the city’s sociality is reflected, paraphrasing Castells, in the flow of spaces and the spatialization of the flows. That is the reason why the city is overflowed with *ramadas* and *fondas* during the festivities. Moreover, the same can be said about the rest of the activities that characterize the celebration of the *fiestas*. The *fiestas* merely come

to accentuate the pattern of social relationships that is proper to the city. I mentioned earlier how the grounds that house the *Ramadas Populares* also accommodate a number of bazaar and market stalls. In 1997, in fact, a whole amusement park was erected next to the grounds of the *ramadas*. These are attended in the afternoons and early evenings by families and teenagers, and constitute but a new modality of the practice of 'space as an outing' that was discussed in Chapter 5. Calle Prat, to cite another example, becomes an exemplar of its own spatiality. The street exhibits in its most paradigmatic form the traits that define it as a 'spatial place'. During the 1999 *Fiestas Patrias* I saw the street used as a performance stage by a *batucada* (Brazilian percussion band), a band of *tropical*, two bands playing indigenous Andean music, three 'human sculptures', a blind solo guitar musician and - perhaps the most visible indication of the extent to which the street is acknowledged by all to be an urban theatrical space - the Symphonic Orchestra of Antofagasta, in the performance of a popular repertoire that included hits such as 'Star Wars' and 'Beauty and the Beast', waltzes and polkas.

There is one last social activity that stands out of all festivities' celebrations for its rituality and its structural significance. The happening is held after lunch, at around 17:00, on September 19, the last day of the *fiestas*. Families from all over the city will then go to the municipal beach resort to *volar volantines* (to fly a kite). This is a remarkable spectacle for its singularity, its beauty and its significance. The resort is inundated with families, hundreds if not thousands of them. That this is a singular pastime is proven by the fact that few children come with their own kites. These are almost always bought on the spot. Few children fly a kite at any other time of the year except on this day. The kites that are bought are rather flimsy themselves, sometimes not even resisting the winds that blow over the beach. This is not much of a concern, however, because the kites are very cheaply priced and one can always buy a second or a

third one (there are a number of people selling kites, most homemade). In 1999 I attended the *día de los volatines* (Day of the Kites) with Francisco, whom I spoke about above, and his family. I was invited over to have lunch with them and we then made a collective move to the municipal beach resort.

Francisco invited me over to lunch today. He lives in Bonilla [a northern neighbourhood]. He asked me to be at his place at around 13:30. When I got there his wife and his mum were in the kitchen, preparing our meal. Marcos and María, his ten and seven year old son and daughter, were watching TV upstairs, in their parents' room, where the only TV in the house is located. Nicolás, his recently born boy, was asleep in one of the upstairs dormitories. I sat down with Francisco in the living/dining room, downstairs. His wife, Marcela, soon came out of the kitchen to greet me. She brought a tray with two *pisco sours* [a bitter sweet alcoholic drink, extremely popular in Chile], one for each of us. We talked briefly before making a move to the table: about his studies, about his work. The conversation over lunch was lively: they asked me about my research, about my flatmates, about my opinion on some urban issues. The kids finished their meals rather quickly and asked permission to resume their TV-watching. Francisco's mum kept silent for most part of the time. After lunch, Francisco's mum took over the washing up with the help of Marcela. Francisco and I went on talking for about one and a half more hours. During that time Marcela went upstairs to rest for a little while. At around 16:30 the kids come down from watching TV and ask eagerly when are we going to the *balneario*. Francisco assents with his head and a collective decision is taken to board the car and go there. We all leave except for Francisco's mum, who stays at home with Nicolás. It takes us some twenty minutes by car to get there. Once there, the kids, Marcela and myself unboard the car while Francisco keeps driving around to find a parking space. The *balneario* is overflowed with people. I don't remember having ever seen the place so crowded. It is not just the *balneario*, though: the adjacent Parque Croata and Parque José Santos Ossa [two nearby parks] are just as crowded. We take a seat in one of the gardens next to the *balneario*. Francisco joins us from parking the car some ten minutes later. Francisco gives some money to María and Marcos with which they go and buy a pair of kites from one of the many people that are selling them. These are called *cometas chinos*, Chinese kites, and are made of plastic. Francisco tells me that the kids have a good kite at home, one he bought for them some years ago. He does not like to bring it to the *balneario*, though, because some people *curan los hilos con vidrio molido* [literally, "drunk the kites' threads with ground glass", meaning that they wet the threads with ground glass] so as to cut through other people's kites should these cross over. Marcela confirms this and adds that some men take the flying of the kites to be a competitive display of their *machismo*: they will take over the flying of the kite only to hand it over to their kids once it is the highest in the skyline. Francisco laughs to her comment but he does not refute it. I am surprised to hear Marcela's remark because I do not see many men around the *balneario*. The place is overcrowded with families but there is a conspicuous absence of adult men in their composition. The kids come back with two Chinese kites and Francisco rises from his seating position to help them get the kites up in the air. He does not spend too much time doing that (that is, he makes little effort to display his competitive skills) and soon resumes his seat with us. We stare at the kids for some time before resuming our talk. I ask them one or two questions but at one point I sense that I am the only one in the mood for conversation. I therefore decide to leave them alone for a while and I rise with the pretext of wanting to check out some familiar faces that I saw when we were driving past on our way into the *balneario* [...] I return three quarters of an hour later to find only Marcela, now reading some magazine. Francisco, she tells me, was tired, they all went to bed really late last night, so he went to the car to take a nap there.

Marcos is still flying his kite while María has sat on the grass next to her mum. I ask Marcela if she comes often with the kids to the *balneario*. Not to the *balneario*, she replies, more to the children's games at Avenida del Brasil. Though Marcos, she adds, is a bit old for that now, so it's been some time since they no longer go there either. Do you like it here, I ask her: "Yes, I like the gardens, and the sea, it's *rico* [nice and cosy] here; it's a pity, though, that it's so far away from home. It's not always like today, that we can count on Francisco to drive us here. When I took the kids to Avenida del Brasil we had to take a bus there, and that can be a bit of a nuisance, a one hour trip." At around 19:00, Francisco returns from his car nap. He smiles to me and asks me if it has been an interesting outing. I say yes to him and add that I have been overwhelmed by the amount of people in the *balneario*, that I have never seen the place so crowded. He looks around, reflects for a while and replies that the *fiestas* allow some men, people that work at the mines for the most part, to spend time with their families. At around 19:30 he asks the children if they would like to eat a hamburger at a fast-food restaurant. The children happily accept their father's proposal so we all make a move to a locale that is sited opposite the beach resort. The place is full of people, waiting in long queues to be served. Francisco is not willing to wait so he proposes instead to go to the fast-food dining hall at *Lider*. That sounds fine to the kids so we all make a move to where Francisco parked the car and leave the *balneario*.

What the visit of Francisco and his family to the *balneario* appears to single out as important is the opportunity of spending the evening in the company of the family. It is the apogee of intimacy towards which the spirit of the festivities tended. Such a celebration of the familial, however, could just as well have been celebrated at home, perhaps with another barbecue. But it is not; it is, on the contrary, celebrated with an outing. The idea of standing together as a family, of representing such an ideal family (that is, of working towards the idea of the family), is objectified in the social process of 'going out'. Where the family is going - to fly kites at the municipal beach resort - is not, we have seen, in itself important. How could it be important to fly a kite when one only worries about it once a year? What is important is to stay together as a family whilst being out of home (the family place by definition), that is, whilst practising space. The *día de los volantines* signs, in an event that is unusual for its singularity and intensity, the importance of the nuclear family in the social structure of the city. It is an occasion in which for the first and last time of the year the father can be said to figure prominently in all familial representations. It is the family as a whole that is 'out' in the city, occupying and appropriating it. Any apogee, however, contains the seeds of its own decline, and the

ideal representation of the family that is objectified on the evening of September 19 is soon to reveal the structural strains that sustain it. With a regularity that can only be defined as caricaturesque, most of the fathers that accompany their families in their evening out to fly *volantines* can be seen at some point to retire to their cars. This is a view as breathtaking as that of the colourful swarm of flying kites. One after another, the cars that are parked in a line in front of the resort (and there are hundreds of them), reveal a man inside, often taking a nap, sometimes reading a newspaper or watching the dancing glide of the kites. The very moment that the nuclear family is to be objectified as an ideal representation, men are distanced from it by the ordinary practice of the quotidian. In the structure of everyday life in Antofagasta men have no prominent part to play (that is, of course, in spatial terms). The apogee of the Spirit of the Eighteenth as the process of the socialization of intimacy coincides therefore with the reestablishment of the habitus of family practices. (I should add here that the ‘family outing’ to *volar volantines* with which the SoE peaks corroborates my proposition that the socialization of intimacy does not take the form of a public vs. private spatialization of sentiments but has more to do with the practice of everyday life.) This is the quotidian in its purest, most structural form. From this moment on men resume their place in the social structure of the city, away from the position of visibility they never really got to occupy.⁷⁴

6.2 All Saints’ Day

All Saints’ Day, a feast of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, the day God is glorified for all his saints, known and unknown, is held on November 1. In medieval

⁷⁴ There is an echo here of Leach’s ‘pendulum view of time’, that is, “time as a discontinuity of repeated contrasts” (1971: 124-136), in the way that the temporality for the whole of the *fiestas* (a *crescendo* of the

England it was called All Hallows; hence the name Halloween (Hallow's eve) for the preceding day, October 31. In Chile, in its contemporary fashion, All Saints' Day is observed as a day of homage and respect to one's forefathers and deceased, and is a national holiday.

In 1999 the holy day was a Monday thus falling on the day following the closure of the *Festival de las Colonias* (Colonies' Festival or Festival of Foreign Collectivities). The festival celebrates the plurality of the city's cultural background and is organized by the Cultural Corporation of Foreign Collectivities, an assembly that gathers the different national associations (*Colonias*) that exist in the city. The festival is as a rule organized on the last weekend of October. In Antofagasta, the coincidence of the festival with Halloween and the temporal stretching of the weekend to effectively encompass the holiday nurtured the crescendo of a collective spirit of gaiety. In some respects, and as I hope the following account will show, the liveliness of the previous days was rolled on to the Monday, and played out and displayed, in its own respectful way, in the massive attendance at the city's cemeteries and the various *campo santos* (sacred grounds) in the *pampa*.

What marks off All Saints' Day from any other day of the year is the custom, on the part of the Antofagastinos, to *recordar a los difuntos* (remember one's deceased) by visiting their graves and going to mass. This is a tradition that mobilizes the whole city. It is so duly complied with that it could almost be described as an urban pilgrimage. In 1999, for example, 80,000 people visited Antofagasta's Municipal Cemetery, whilst the privately run *Cementerio Parque San Cristobal* was attended by an additional 25,000 people (*El Mercurio de Antofagasta*, 2 November 1999). The pilgrimage label, however, would perhaps suit better the description of the caravans of buses and cars that leave

sociality of intimacy that peaks on the Day of the Kites) is constructed.

Antofagasta in the direction of the hinterland *oficinas* of Vergara, Coya Sur, Chacabuco, Pedro de Valdivia, María Elena and Pampa Unión. The derelict and abandoned nitrate refineries, today vestiges of a desert-wide museum of proletarian martyrdom, are visited, in what many people do not hesitate in describing as a “sacred ritual”, by the relatives of those buried there. Hundreds of families, well equipped with food, paint, musical instruments (we will see below what for) and flowers (paper and plastic, there is little point in carrying real flowers to the desert), leave Antofagasta for the day in what both the press and some informants described as a ‘trip to the past’. People will stay at the old nitrate refineries for lunch, having sandwiches, crisps and drinks that they will have carried with them in a picnic basket. Their trips are truly ‘day trips’, with people staying at the *oficinas* for up to ten hours, from 10:00 to 20:00 (this is certainly the case if people have gone as part of an organized trip and have therefore arranged for their collective transportation). In the *pampa* it is also relatively common to see *murgas* (brass bands) playing *in memoriam* of old *pampinos*, moving around the cemetery and every now and then stopping to play for a few minutes in front of the grave of a relative or dear friend. On All Saints’ Day 1997 I left for Pedro de Valdivia with Paula, whom I introduced in relation to her visits to *Líder*, and her family. Paula’s parents lived in Pedro de Valdivia (a nitrate refinery that is now closed) for some thirty years; they are, as they call themselves, *pampinos*, that is, people from the *pampa*. Hernán, Paula’s father, along with other senior *pampinos*, had arranged for a bus to take a number of families (around ten) to the *oficina*. I was told by Paula to be at her father’s house at 09:30. Eight people boarded the bus at the house: Hernán, his wife, his mother-in-law, Paula, her two children, her sister and myself. Some of Hernán’s kin were also coming, bringing along their respective families. Once on the bus I counted fifty-eight people, out of which twenty-one were children. The trip to Pedro de Valdivia takes some two hours. I asked

Hernán and other *pampinos* about the meaning of the trip, why it was so important for them to go back to the *pampa* and they would not content themselves by attending mass in Antofagasta. This is what Hernán told me:

H: Our *gente* [people] are there. The *pampa* is our past, we grew up there, and I lived there and worked there. I am not nostalgic, I am not saying it was always good there, but that is my life, I cannot just turn oblivious to it.

Q: But not everyone in the bus has lived in the *oficina*, not everyone is *pedrino* [from Pedro de Valdivia]?

H: No, most of the kids were brought up in Antofagasta; but they have to come with us, there is no way we could arrange it for them to stay in Antofagasta. Besides, they like it, it's sort of an entertainment for them, to spend the day out. We take our packed lunches with us, and they like it in the desert, to run about and play, carefree. I think it is a nice way to spend the day with the family.

And Paula:

My dad feels very strongly about the *pampa*, and I think quite rightly so, because this was *su casa* [his house, his motherland], you see, and now is gone, there is nothing left - it's such a pity! So I do like coming here, to imagine how life was here. Plus this is a good day as any other to get out of Antofagasta. There are not that many occasions in which one can leave the city, and I think the kids like it, it's something new for them.

The construction of All Saints' Day as a 'day out' is rehearsed by those that stay in the city. In 1999 I spent All Saint's Day in the company of the family of Jaime, a twenty-nine year old truck driver at Chuquicamata (the mine) whom I had met through a common friend and who agreed for me to spend the day with his family (he was still living in his parent's home). On the night of Halloween I attended a party to which he had been invited too and we agreed then that it would be better for me to spend the night at his parents' house in order to keep up with the day's events from the very start.

We got back from the Halloween party at around 05:00. Jaime lives with his parents (Carla and Manuel), his twenty-seven year old sister (Karen) and her six year old daughter (Yarela). Jaime had predicted that we would not be back home before then, so he had told Karen to

wake me up to join the rest of the family for breakfast. (For his part, Jaime was not too keen on accompanying his family in their visit to the cemetery.) At half past nine, Karen wakes me up. I join Carla, Manuel, Yarela and Karen for breakfast. Yarela is very excited, not the least because of my presence. She asks if her dad, Ricardo, will join them at some point. Karen says that she spoke with him yesterday and that he said he would be happy to join them after lunch at the children's games in Avenida del Brasil. Yarela finishes her breakfast and runs away to her bedroom to put together some school material that she wants to show her dad. Karen asks me if I have made plans for lunch, to which I reply that I have not. "Good", she says, "because I have prepared our packed lunch with you in mind." We then start to talk about the city's cemeteries. We will be going to the municipal cemetery. There is, though, another cemetery in town, the privately run *Parque San Cristobal*. This, Karen tells me, is nicer, it has gardens and fresh flowers; it's less *árido* (arid, dry). We are about to leave the house, at around eleven, when Karen advises Yarela to take a jumper with her. It is a very hot day outside and Yarela is wearing a t-shirt and short trousers. Karen is worried, however, that it may get colder in the evening so it is better to be equipped for that.

To the foreign eye, what is most remarkable about the way that All Saints' Day is celebrated in Antofagasta is the cohesion that all activities imprint on the family unit. There is, for example, very little emphasis placed on the way that children (and anyone else, for that matter) should dress up for the occasion. In Spain, for instance, children are dressed up *de domingo* (with Sunday clothes) when partaking of a tradition - that of going to the cemetery - that is presumed a formality. This is not the case in Antofagasta. All Saints' Day is a family day and as such there is little point in underscoring one time of the day (the visit to the cemetery) over another. In certain respects, however, the whole day is structured around the visit to the cemetery (this is most conspicuous, of course, in the case of those travelling to the *pampa*); that is, the underlying family business of going to the cemetery is used to construct a 'family day' out of it. What is interesting about this construction of a 'family day' out of All Saints' Day is the way in which the "sacred" ritual of paying respect to one's deceased is played down in favour of the practice of paying (extraordinary) attention to one's children.

We arrive at the cemetery at around 11:30. The cemetery, at that time and throughout the whole day, hosts a breathtaking spectacle. The gateways to the cemetery are surrounded by a mass of traders, selling water buckets (for the flowers and to help clean the graves), chemical liquids (to polish and brighten the grilles that protect the niches and the gates to the mausoleums that are owned by the *colonias* and the richest families), flowers and bouquets,

ice-creams, soda drinks and sweets, and hiring wooden ladders to those that have to reach the higher niches. Inside the cemetery, hundreds of families ramble about its grounds. Dressed up in summer clothes (shorts, t-shirts, caps, sandals) and carrying bouquets and bunches of flowers, buckets of water, cans of paint and picnic baskets, streams of families look and wander around the cemetery, trying to orient themselves in the direction of their relatives' graves. We do not stop to buy anything because Carla and Karen already left the house with a bouquet, some flowers and some chemicals and water bottles that they kept from previous visits. Yarela, though, insists to her mum on getting an ice-cream. She argues that it is a very warm day (it is indeed) and that once inside the cemetery grounds there will be no one around from which to buy a refreshment (she is wrong about this). Karen remains adamant and tells her that her dad will probably invite her later to an ice-cream at the *balneario*. Yarela does not seem particularly convinced with her mum's explanation. At this point Manuel intervenes by asking Yarela if she has ever climbed to the cemetery's lookout. [The cemetery is located due east of the city centre, deployed across the first slopes of the coastal range that circumscribes the city along that cardinal direction. It offers, therefore, a vantage point from where to obtain a panoramic vista of Antofagasta. In fact, at one of the cemetery's highest points, there is a lookout that people can climb to for such a purpose.] Manuel's question attracts Yarela's attention. She has never been to the lookout, no, so we now all make a collective move in that direction. The climb to the lookout is full of families with children. Every now and then we pause to take a look. Yarela enjoys herself spotting places that are familiar to her: the Cathedral, the harbour, Ripley (a national department store chain), Líder. I brought a camera with me so once at the top Manuel asks somebody to take a picture of all us. On our way down we hear a brass band playing so we decide to look for the band by following the music. We find them playing in front of a mausoleum. They are surrounded by quite a number of people. Manuel explains to me that the bands play to honour the memory of former members. We leave the company of the band and finally make it to the tombs of Carla's parents. Once there we all sit on the ground. Carla kneels down over the graves and starts replacing the old bouquets with the new ones, wiping off the dust, cleaning the engraved initials and generally ornamenting as nicely as possible the tombs. Karen helps her out in some of these tasks. While Carla and Karen are busy doing this Manuel chats with Yarela. He begins telling her stories about her grandparents, how they came to live in Antofagasta, how life was then, how things have changed. Her curiosity brings him to start talking about her own childhood, when she was a baby. The women are dedicated to the brushing and cleaning for about twenty to thirty minutes. After that, they join Manuel in his storytelling. At around 13:30, Karen suggests that we all go to Avenida del Brasil to have our packed lunch there. It will be nicer to have it in the gardens, she says, and, because it is still early, we can afford to go all the way there.

After their visit to the cemetery many families will take advantage of the fact that they are close to the centre of town to have lunch (if they have not already at the cemetery) at one of the fast-food locales that can be found there. Thereafter they might take their young ones to the children's games at Avenida del Brasil, producing a spatial outing of the type that has already been described in Chapter 5. A similarly popular destination, one that gains acceptance as the weather improves (and spring, in Antofagasta, is a very generous season in that respect), is the municipal beach resort, to

where one can even walk to from nearby Avenida del Brasil. It is in this sense remarkable the fluidity with which a singular socio-spatial occasion (the visit to the cemetery) is linked to and fitted into the well established outing to Avenida del Brasil. Not only much of what goes on at the cemetery (the sale of ice-creams, sweets and drinks, the climb to the lookout, the storytelling) is arranged specially for children, but the whole way in which the day's temporalities are articulated (again, the climb to the lookout and the storytelling; lunch at a fast-food locale, the stroll to Avenida del Brasil or the municipal beach resort) is done with the children in mind. In this light, the description of the singular social occasion that is All Saints' Day reveals how different modes of spatiality and temporality can be used to reproduce and yet alter the habitus of everyday life. I ask Karen about this, about to what extent the way they have arranged and organized their holiday resembles any Saturday or Sunday:

K: What do you mean?

Q: The things that you do on a day like today, are they the same as the ones you do on a weekend?

K: [Vacillates] Do you mean if I come to the cemetery every weekend?

Q: No, no. I mean if you come to Avenida del Brasil with Yarela and, if that is the case, why are you coming today too; I mean, do you always come here [Avenida del Brasil] when you have the chance to?

K: You want to know if I dedicate my time to Yarela on a holiday the same way as I do on a weekend?

Q: Yes.

K: Yes, I do. I think at home we live holidays as if they were weekends. I mean, we do pretty much the same things. We spend a lot of time at home during the week, we rarely go out, to Prat perhaps, or Líder, but that's it. Some weekends Yarela invites friends over from school, or she herself gets invited to the house of a friend. If there is nothing arranged, however, we like to come here; we already spend too much time at home during the week.

Q: When you do come, do you always have lunch here?

K: Sometimes but not always. Today it was easier this way. There was little point in returning home to have lunch only to go out again. Besides, it's a very nice day today, the weather is very nice and I think is kind of a waste of time to stay at home all day long.

Q: Are you going to mass later today?

K: No, we are not. Mum and dad are; we will stay here; I told Ricardo [Yarela's father] to come over and we'll spend the rest of the day here, we might go to the *Fisa* [the amusement park] or the *balneario*, I don't know, perhaps Ricardo has planned something for Yarela.

All Saints' Day is in many respects a spatio-temporal production that uses a religious convention to objectify the ideas that people in Antofagasta have about certain social processes, of which the role that children have to play in the constitution of family life is a prominent one. There is here, as with many other instances of social life in Antofagasta, an explicit desire on the part of social actors to fabricate social processes through the creative production and articulation of new spatial and temporal worlds. The 'trip to the past' that is represented in the visits to the *pampa's* graveyards and the city's cemeteries could, in fact, just as well be described as a 'trip to the future', for it is as a result of the expansion of the habitus of everyday life into new spaces that old liturgical worlds are slowly bestowed with new meanings. One is thus left wondering whether, in Antofagasta, the visits to the cemeteries on All Saints' Day have less to do with paying respect to one's deceased and more to do with the appraisal and acknowledgement (and social objectification) of the very significant part that children play in family life.⁷⁵

6.3 Conclusion

In Chapters 5 and 6 I have embarked on the project of producing a set of spatial ethnographies for a number of 'structural' and situational spaces that are characteristic (that is, characteristic *and* abnormal) of social life in Antofagasta. If there is one general conclusion to be extracted from this exercise in geographical and anthropological imagination, it is that space is always and everywhere a secretion of the social structure, an outgrowth of the play of a particular set of social relationships.

⁷⁵ Or that the family plays in children's lives. I have opted for the first formulation, however, for as a participant-observer I was bestowed with the agency of an adult.

Our investigation into the ways that social relationships produce spaces in Antofagasta has allowed us to see in a clearer light the role that certain social institutions and certain aspects of the city's material culture play in the structuration of everyday life. It is in this vein that the very important place that the landscape of consumption (supermarkets, markets, Calle Prat) occupies in the sociality of the city has been brought to our attention. It has been suggested, however, that the environmental conspicuity of consumption should not be immediately presumed an index of consumerism, for the 'world of goods' may be used for something other than individually-centred, rational-minded consumption. To put it another way: 'going shopping' should not be unreflectively equated with the act of shopping itself. Moreover, not only may the landscape of consumption be used to open up new forms of sociality, but it may also be used, through its incorporation to a generative body of quotidian socio-spatial practices, as an idiom or dimension through which certain social groups may find it easier to become significant agents; for example, students and children.

In a more general way, the part played by students and children in the spatial construction of the quotidian has been shown to be fundamental for the working of Antofagasta's social system. The agency of children has proved to be indispensable in the constitution of almost every social space in the city. It is not that children are actually involved in the social production of spaces (which they are, for space is a practical category) but that the spatialization of their agency is itself constituent of the flow of everyday social life. The temporal and spatial worlds of childhood form a set of structural dimensions that are used to reproduce and yet alter the habitus of everyday life (eg. All Saints' Day, Day of the Kites, *Lider*, etc.).

Much of the structural centrality of children is in fact related to the prominent part they play, along with women, in the representation of family life. Moreover, it has been

shown that the idea of the family (as it is objectified in the outings of women and children) is often represented against the specific form of the sociality of transience. In both Calle Prat and the Flea Market the family is defined against the transitoriness of the circumscribing environment. This is a characteristic that can be traced back to most other urban social groups, be they the groups of *taquilleros* or unemployed men in Calle Prat, students at the bus stop in Calle José Santos Ossa, or groups of children hanging about *Líder* supermarket. The groups' cohesion and continuity (that is, their transcendence) is underscored against the transience and fluidity of the surrounding environment (fluidity of goods, people and time). Yet there is no strict dyadic opposition of modes of sociality here, for the 'practice of transcendence' is often only tenuously separated from that of transience. Back to the representation of the idea of the family, for example, it is surprising the extent to which much of what is done, is done for children. From the point of view of the social structure, the central role played by children suggests that what is being emphasized are the changing and therefore transient elements of the social system: the structural weight of children - as opposed to, for example, that of grandparents - tilts the category of the family towards modes of temporality that are associated with change and transience (eg. the much cited 'family outings'). There is, in fact, on a closer look, a superabundance of transitory forms of social organization in Antofagasta; for example, in the merchandising stalls of mobile telecommunications companies that can be found almost everywhere (in Calle Prat, in *Líder*, in *Korlaet del Parque*); in the like and predilection for ephemeral market forms (the Flea Market, the 'hippies' stalls' in Avenida del Brasil, in front of *Korlaet del Parque*); in the supreme singularity of the Day of the Kites; in the various modes of theatrical occupation of the streets (mimes, musicians, artists, painters, clowns, puppeteers, orchestras, political mobilizations); in the weekend family events (eg. the *Cachureos* show organized at *Líder*) that are set up in

supermarkets and department stores. In fact, if there were one word that would comprehend all of the variations of the sociality of transitoriness, that would probably be the term 'event'. It is the open-ended structure of events, defined as singular social occasions, that characterizes them for their 'anything-can-happen', 'anything-can-be-found' culture. They are the structural form of a culture of possibilities.

Transience and transcendence are therefore, in Antofagasta, placed in a somewhat ambiguous mode of structural opposition. Rather than a clear cut divide between one form of sociality and the other, what we have found is a hazy region where there is a perpetual shifting coalescence between the two. This is cast in a clearer light if we look at the workings of social relationships as inherently spatial. Then, our traditional two-dimensional understanding of sociality is suddenly 'inflated' and opened to a sphere of new social opportunities. Social relationships are no longer to be understood as circulating along a flat plain but as occurring in space-time, deploying social paths as they are worked out. It is this understanding that allows us to see a visit to the cemetery as being both in line with and yet transgressive of the habitus of everyday life; it is this understanding that allows us to talk of the Day of the Kites as a 'family outing' (a spatial formulation in itself) that both reproduces and yet undermines the category of the family as an ideal representation; it is this understanding, also, that allows us to see how the material culture of consumption (supermarkets and Calle Prat) is appropriated by students and children to express their claims to significant social agency. This is why we can talk of space in Antofagasta as an 'event', a singular social occasion, and of its spatiality as a structure (for it is the *structural* participation of women, children and students that generally make them up) of events. For each event allows social relationships to be played out *spatially* in an original way, and, therefore, to open sociality to the possibility of change.

Space is much more than a physical or material setting. It is a structural moment of society; it is a dimension that is inherent to social relationships. Social relationships are not deployed in space but worked out spatially. The study of space and spatiality is therefore a window, and a transparent one for that, to understanding the intricacies of any social system. In Antofagasta, the invisible fabric of space is threaded by the activities of women, children and students. To take a look at how the practice of everyday life by these agents produces and sanctions the social geography of the city is to lay a hand on, and to grope one's way through, the hazy texture of space.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have attempted to document and show how the people of Antofagasta deal and cope with the environment that surrounds them. My argument has been that their mode of coping is an act of *poesis*, of creation, and that their relationship with the landscape (urban and non-urban) that circumscribes their lives is therefore defined by a disposition and habit towards the opening of new forms of sociality.

The relationship that the people of Antofagasta have with their city and, historically, with the desert, is one of superableness, of trying to overcome the limiting structures that the (social and physical) environment in which they live has imposed and keeps imposing on them. This, I have argued throughout this thesis, should not be interpreted as an act of appropriation of the surrounding space but, through the playing and mapping out of novel forms of spatiality, as a creation of space itself. This said, there are a number of issues at work here and I will do better by discerning and dealing with each of them separately.

In Chapter 1 I recounted the story of the spatialization of the desert. There I attempted to show that History does not unfold solely through time but also through space. In fact, if there is one lesson that I would have liked that chapter to have taught that would be that History, to be fully understood, must be seen as intrinsically spatial. The history of the urbanization of the desert, of its colonization and domestication, is the history of the struggle for the imposition of a meaning to its space. The social institutions and actors that I identified as the key players in that struggle - the Church, the State, the Literature, Capital and Labour -, all fought for setting and fixing the meaning of the desert's space. The Church, for instance, saw the desert as a space of corruption and degradation that ought to be ordained, that is, both ordered and consecrated. The Literature, to cite another example, saw the desert as a museum of martyrdom: the *pampa*, in the writings of the poets, was sacralized as a pristine territory, a timeless landscape devoid of all historical references. Labour, for its part, appropriated the desert as a liquid geography, a map of flowing social relationships that enabled it to evade and escape the strictures of the disciplinary regime to which Capital subjected it. More importantly, perhaps, no space-making discourse was ever entirely victorious and dominant. A fact that allows us to assert that whatever way social relationships were being played, whichever the discourse effected and embraced at any particular time, space, the space of the desert, was always in the making.

The description of the *pampa* that I afforded in that chapter further allowed me to make two additional claims. On the one hand, the idea that the social geography of the desert varied depending on whose interests were at stake, led me to postulate a coterminous variation in the geography of Antofagasta. The space of Antofagasta, I contended, was never circumscribed to the city (to its built environment, if you please) but incorporated the larger *pampa* to whose geography it was physically and, more

importantly, socially ascribed. The nitrate miners saw in Antofagasta a refuge from the demands of their labour; the distance that separated the city from the nitrate refineries never being of concern to them because of the role that the town played in their biographies - Antofagasta being an essential part of the spatiality of their social relationships.⁷⁶

On a second front, the fact that the geography of the desert and the city could be described as mercurial and variable led me to think about the urbanization of Antofagasta not as a process but as a mode of sociality. It seemed to me that the process of urbanization (particularly in developing economies) was too broadly understood as an aspect of the overall industrialization of the country. This is often presented as just one moment, or a number of moments, of the eventual incorporation of the urbanizing settlement to capitalist society (the famous urbanization of the frontier). But that, in the case of Antofagasta, could simply not be held to be true. To my eyes, the history of Antofagasta could only be read as that of one hundred and forty years of *frontier* urbanization. The frontier, rather than an episode in capitalist urbanization, could, in the case of Antofagasta, aptly be described as a social system in its own terms.

In Chapter 2 I set myself the task of telling a similar story to that of the first chapter if this time situating it in contemporary Antofagasta. My overall aim was to trace the links between the structural forms and cultural formations that make up the socio-economic system of present day Antofagasta. I looked at how the city was being planned, where the projects of future development aimed at taking her and who was behind all such initiatives and manoeuvres. The very important role that the city plays for the Chilean

⁷⁶ In identifying what it is that defines anthropology as a discipline, Alfred Gell wrote: "Anthropology differs from these [sociology, social psychology, etc.] in providing a particular *depth of focus*, which perhaps one could best describe as 'biographical', that is, the view taken by anthropology of social agents attempts to replicate the time perspective of these agents on themselves" (1998: 10).

economy has led the local powerholders (the industrialists, the Town Hall and the regional government) to engage in and endorse the production of a cultural narrative that centres on the local resonance of buzzwords such as ‘history’, ‘identity’, ‘consumption’ and ‘modernity’. This said, we would do better, I argued, if we looked at such a narrative (or ideology) not just as a ‘textual’ production, but as a sort of theatrical representation - as a spatial discourse. For the discourse that the powerholders are trying to put together has very specific spatial undertones. The modern city, the narrative sustains, is a healthy, familiar, consumer-friendly and historical city. The narrative, however, is being acted out at particular places (Calle Prat, *Líder*, Avenida del Brasil) thereby silently providing a background and a concrete environment to the otherwise apparently vacuous concept of modernity. My argument is that one has to read this as a strategy to reduce space to a specific set of places and meanings. In other words, a strategy that aims at legitimating a particular spatial production as a ‘natural’ environment.

The cultural narrative that has been set in motion by the local powerholders, if powerful indeed, has not been strong enough to become the cement that will integrate the whole of Antofagasta’s society. For it has been confronted, or, at any rate, reinterpreted, on many fronts. These other ways of spatialising the city is what Chapters 4 to 6 aimed at describing.

The gist of my argument, in the three chapters that make up most of the ethnography, is that social relationships, in Antofagasta, have threaded a landscape of possibilities, that is, a structural mode of coping with the (social) environment in ways that are always original. This is what students do in their nocturnal *paseos*; the way that families represent their weekend strolls to Avenida del Brasil or the Flea Market; what *taquillas* look for in hanging about Calle Prat; the manner in which children think of a visit to *Líder* or the Korlaet del Parque supermarket. In looking for places where to play out

their social relationships, the Antofagastinos are producing a spatiality whose common denominator is the search for novelty. Moreover, the fact that this novelty needs to be played out once and again allows us to speak of it as a 'structure of practices', the word 'practices' here standing for the social relationships themselves. This I take to be somewhat important because it allows us to concentrate on the social actors whose agency is triggering off the search for novelty in the first place. If people keep referring their spatiality to the flow of social relationships (if people keep talking of *doing* things somewhere rather than going *somewhere* to do something), then space becomes something that is practised and secreted rather than the place where social relationships unfold. In this light, space, far from a transparent medium, becomes the idiom or dimension through which certain people effect their agency. It becomes a *capacity*, something that people do to obtain things. *Taquillas* become noticed by locating themselves in Calle Prat; children become significant agents by prefiguring and dominating the rambling about of the family unit in its strolls to *Líder* or to Avenida del Brasil; university students use the uncharted spaces of the desert or the enchanting isolation of the Ruinas to posit their own claims to identity and significant agency.

It is not just their agency, though, that these groups are attempting to delineate or constitute. My argument is not - or not simply - that space is a medium for the constitution of identity (or status, gender, religion, etc.). I want to take the argument further (or, rather, backwards) and argue that the constitution of identity (indeed, the playing out of social relationships at large) can only be done *through* space. Said somewhat differently: that social relationships are inherently *spatial*. I believe this to be a rather significant claim because it means that whatever social idioms people have decided to construct their agency through, and whatever the terms in which they represent their sociality, these will always be *spatial*. We can therefore now look to

space to describe in greater detail the means and modes that people employ to construct their social worlds. Space, in the same line as art objects, dress codes, food, etc., now becomes an instrument and dimension of people's agency. Unlike the latter, however, whose use and employment is not ubiquitous, space *is* everywhere, something that people always and everywhere 'carry' with them and do.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I explored this inherent spatiality of social relationships by looking at the ways that space is used in Antofagasta to define and give shape to what Daniel Miller (1994) has called the social idioms of 'transcendence' and 'transience'. These are, it may be recalled, two distinct modes of experiencing temporality and of organizing a group's social and moral life; they are, too, when placed within the framework of a tensional dialectic, the defining traits of Modernity. When I looked at how people constructed their worlds of transcendence and transience through the lens of space I came to confront a rather different picture. The moment I incorporated a spatial dimension to the categories 'transcendent' and 'transience' their distinctiveness was blurred and their neat opposition crumbled down. In his ethnography of Chaguanas, in Trinidad, Miller, for instance, draws an important distinction between 'the domestic' as the realm of interiority and transcendence and the outside world as the realm of transience (1994: 100). In my own ethnography of spatial practices I came to see 'the domestic', however, as a process of 'domestication' of the city. People were taking 'the domestic' out to the city, practising transcendence as they moved about it. This is what the spatial outings to Avenida del Brasil or the Day of the Kites were all about. Transcendence and transience become therefore dangerously conflated. The idea of the family as a transcendental social unit, for example, was being objectified through its own appropriation and production of a liminal landscape. In their search for novelty, people were practising transcendence *through* transience (by which I mean not just physical

movement from one place to another but a *structural* mode of coping with their social environment, a habitus of social practices that led them to embrace and endorse a culture of possibilities). In this light, space is no longer to be understood as the context - symbolic, environmental or otherwise - that frames people's relationships, but as an aspect or dimension itself of those relationships. Space is but another mode of expressing agency, another way to bestow, obtain or elicit meanings from the world. Space is something that people put to use, indeed, that they fabricate as they live their lives. Space is a capacity.

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